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Rainbow Gold

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RAINBOW GOLD

VOL. I.

RAINBOW GOLD

A NOVEL

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF 'JOSEPH'S COAT' 'HEARTS' 'A MODEL FATHER' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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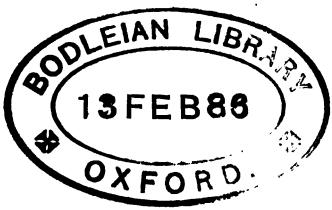
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TO MY WIFE.

I.

It is but half a dozen years,
  Sweet Heart, since Hope was all our store,
And he was meagre with his fears
  Of famine, ere we gathered more.

In those old days, that are so sweet
  And were so bitter, first I told
Whilst you sat nestled at my feet
  This story of the Rainbow Gold.

You urged me—This must make a book!
  You pressed me further—Make a name!
I see you with your eager look,
  I hear your prophecy of fame.

A book? That's grown a frequent thing.
  A name? The newspaper critiques,
With wings that soothe, or tails that sting,
  Have buzzed about the name for weeks.

But Fame? Oh, there the giants build!
  They plant, they train their mighty vine!
I am not of their awful guild—
  I grow another sort of wine.

Yet, ladling by the barrel's brink,
And keeping open house for all,
I take a sort of pride to think
The wine is honest, though 'tis small.

'Twere cheap and quick to lend it fire;
The Frenchman's new-brewed chalice owns
All fevers of the vile desire
That racks old Lust's unmarrowed bones.

Ah, no! The liquor may be thin:
It shall be honest. He who sips
Shall lift no sugary poisoned sin
Of my concoction to his lips.

Hands round, my brethren, young and old,
And make a compact, strong and sure,
Oath-clinched and sound—It shall be told
For ever—English Art was pure!

II.

But someone takes me here to task—
The spruce reviewer, young and smart—
Who pricks me with his quill to ask,
'Who bade *you* speak for English Art?'

The merest lad that Nelson took
Triumphing homeward from the war
Might wag his tongue, without rebuke,
With 'We who fought at Trafalgar!'

The man of letters—hear my boast—
  Who wields the feeblest English pen
Claims kinship with the splendid host
  Whose thoughts have made us Englishmen.

And though the critic sneer deride
  This kinship as a foolish dream,
I will not check one pulse of pride
  Or bate one boast upon the theme.

That English soil, where Shakespeare's tree
  In magic leaf and odorous flower
Uplifts its lusty majesty,
  Feeds, too, this wildweed of an hour.

III.

So, best and dearest of my friends,
  At whose rich heart my heart keeps warm,
Whose step grows sure where sunshine ends,
  Whose love takes life from cold and storm;

True partner in old sunless days;
  True partner now in summer's glow;
You whom I cannot pay in praise
  One tittle of the wealth I owe:

I bring to you the tale you loved
  Before my pen had traced a line,
More hopeful since your heart approved
  Than if it merely flattered mine.

RAINBOW GOLD.

PROLOGUE.

A HUNCHBACKED dwarf, waiting in Fleet Street for the clock to strike, looked in at a pawnbroker's shop window. It was night-time, and the street was filled with flaring lights and dismal shadows. The rain plashed mournfully, and oily tears, within and without, smeared the glass of the window panes. The hunchback's battered hat and seedy cloak were agleam with rain, and he shivered as he looked at the window. He was a sorrowful figure, and had a sorrowful story if anybody had cared to hear it. His expression was one of starven misfortune and servitude to fate, but he wore a look of pathetic dignity which no creature with a heart could have insulted.

He was hungry and lonely, and had scarce heart left in him for anything, when he turned to while away a minute in rainy Fleet Street, and looked, as if by chance, at a pawnbroker's window. And lo! he was wet and hungry, and despised and poor, no longer, and no longer aweary of the world. There awoke within him the most extravagant soul of hope, the tenderest memories, and the most passionate singleness of purpose.

All this chaos of emotion opened in his heart at the mere sight of a medal which hung in the pawnbroker's window. The medal bore a ticket, and on the ticket was inscribed: 'Eastern Curio. Guinea Gold. With Inscription. Only 2*l.* 5*s.*'

BOOK I.

HOW HERCULE ASMODÉE BONAVENTURE ENLISTED JOB ROUND.

CHAPTER I.

MR. EZEKIEL ROUND stood at his door on a summer day, seeing nothing, thinking of nothing, and smoking. He was a man with a well-filled waistcoat (it comes natural to mention his waistcoat first), a red face, clean shaven, fiery hair, and an expression of habitual aggravation. His shoes were big and heavy, and looked self-willed. So did his legs and his shoulders; and his red fists hung at his sides with an air of sulky pugnacity at rest.

Mr. Round's long churchwarden depended from his lips, and the bowl lay upon his red

plush waistcoat near the flapped pocket on the right-hand side. From beneath his waistcoat trailed a big silver chain with a handful of seals attached to it. His small-clothes were of fine corduroy, and his stockings of grey worsted; he wore no coat, and his opinionated shirt-collars rose to his ears. He was short, but broad, and so rounded with good living that when you viewed him sideways the lower button of his waistcoat showed a foot in front of his pragmatical double chin. Behind Mr. Round, on the top of the steps which led to the doorway, sat a bulldog with pink eyes, who licked his jaws in the vain relish of fancy, and winked covetously at his master's calves.

When Mr. Round had stood for half an hour or so in the afternoon sunshine, bullying the opposite houses with his inflammatory waistcoat, a slight grey man came along the road and passed him with a salutation.

'Good afternoon, Round.'

'Afternoon, Armstrong.'

'Fine weather for the crops.'

'Might be wuss,' said Ezekiel; 'might be better.' The grey man walked on a step or two in pursuance of his business, and Ezekiel knocked the ashes from his pipe. 'Armstrong.' The grey man turned and retraced his steps. 'Gi'e me a word, Armstrong!'

'Certainly. What is it?'

'That lad o' mine,' said Mr. Round, touching the grey man on the shoulder with the tip of his pipe-stem. The other looked up at him with absent-minded eyes. 'That gell o' yourn.'

'Girl of mine?' asked Armstrong. 'What girl of mine?' He was alert and upright in a minute, and his quick Scottish speech contrasted sharply with Ezekiel's slow Black Country drawl.

'Now, don't you be peppery wi' me, Armstrong. Theer's no cause nor rayson to be peppery. A civil answer to a civil question is what might be looked for in a man like you.'

The grey man smiled dryly, and yet with a

certain sweetness of humour. 'Ask your civil question.'

'That lad o' mine, and that gell o' yourn. What's between 'em?'

'You and I are between them,' said Armstrong.

'Eh?' returned Ezekiel, staring at him. 'I'm told as Job is continual to be found a-mouching round your house.'

'And you don't like that?'

'No. I don't like it. And what's more, I put my foot on it.'

'Very good,' said the Scot. 'It's a pleasant thing for neighbours to dwell together in unity. I put my foot on it also.'

'Poverty's no sin, so far as ever I heerd,' said Ezekiel, chinking the money in his pocket, 'and wealth's no virtue—maybe. But what I say is, "Every man to his position in life to which it may please God to call him." If Job behaves himself theer's a tidy penny for him. If he crosses his father, and marries, so to speak, below him, I shake the dust off of my

feet agen him, and he is no more worthy to be called my son.'

'There's a forbear of yours alluded to in Shakespeare, my friend,' returned the grey man, 'as being able to quote Scripture for his purpose. I'm glad to see the old family characteereestics reviving. I make out that you desire to put an end to the lad's visits at my house.'

'That's my wish,' said Ezekiel, decisively. 'If he marries apart from my will, he won't get a penny o' *my* money. Mind that now. Not a penny.'

'My good man,' said the other, quietly, 'you think just a trifle too much of your money. There's nobody wants your money. There's just other two or three things in the world worth thinking of. If the lad calls again I'll tell him it's against your will, and that I can't allow it. Good afternoon.'

'Hold on,' said Ezekiel. 'You can tell him now. Here he is—a-coming down the street this very minute.'

'You can tell him not to call,' answered Armstrong; 'and if he calls in spite of that, I'll tell him that I can't have him at my house. More's the pity, for I like the lad.'

Mr. Round raised his voice and bellowed 'Job.' The youngster waved his hand in reply, and came swaggering down the street with a quickened step. He was a trifle over six feet in height, and remarkably broad-shouldered for two-and-twenty. He was clean-shaven, after the manner of the time. He wore straps to his trousers; his coat-collar had a great roll to it; his hat was bell-topped and much curled at the brim. Under one arm he carried a slender tasselled cane, and in one hand he flourished a pair of gloves. Altogether he looked like a buck of the first order—for Castle Barfield, where the splendours of town could hardly be expected to find a perfect reproduction. He was a handsome fellow into the bargain, with fine grey eyes, a biggish nose, curly red hair, thickset eyebrows many shades darker, and mouth and chin a thought

too hard for his years. He carried his head well up, and swaggered in his gait, not offensively, but out of strength and elasticity and high spirits.

'Well, Mr. Armstrong,' cried this new comer, when within a dozen yards. 'How are you? What about the new gambit?'

'Useless,' said the grey man. 'Bishop to king's knight's fifth, and the game's over.'

'D'ye think so?' asked the youngster, laughing. 'I'll come down to-night and try that.'

'Will you?' said his father, in a jeering growl. The lad looked at him swiftly, and then looked at Armstrong.

'Hillo!' he cried; 'what's wrong here?'

'Speak your mind, Armstrong,' said Ezekiel.

'I haven't a mind in the matter,' returned Armstrong, dryly. 'Speak your mind for yourself, my man.'

'Very well, then,' said Ezekiel. 'Here's my mind, Job. I want you to stop them goings on of yours at Armstrong's.'

'Goings on?' asked Job. 'What goings on?'

'I am fairly well beknown,' said his father, 'to be a man as says a thing and sticks to it.' Ezekiel was not young or handsome as his son was, but the two were curiously alike as they stood facing each other.

'That's a fine principle—on one condition,' said Armstrong, placidly. 'But ye need a heap o' warldly wisdom and heavenly guidance with it. What d'ye do when you find you've said the wrong thing?'

'What I say I stick to,' repeated Ezekiel, without paying much heed to this inquiry. 'You stop them goings on at Armstrong's.'

'What goings on?' asked Job a second time.

'I've nothin' to say agen Armstrong,' said Ezekiel, with a tolerant wave of his pipe; 'and nothin' to say agen his gells. But endure them goings on I will not. Nayther will Armstrong.'

'Speak a little plainer, if you please, father,' said Job. For so young a man he had a

remarkably deep voice, and he was so tall that though his father stood upon the bottom step of the little flight of three which led to the doorway, he could still look down upon him.

'I am a man,' returned his father, 'as will nayther give an offence nor tek one. Therefore, I say afore William Armstrong's face what I'd say behind his back—which is this—his gells is no match for a lad o' mine.'

The lad's face had that pallor which so often accompanies red hair, and a slight blush showed readily. He flushed scarlet now, with mingled shame and anger, and almost in the same instant turned on Armstrong with a look and gesture of apology.

'I could answer that,' he said, 'from any other man in the world, sir. But since my father says it, I can only be ashamed of it.'

'From his own p'int of view, my lad,' answered Armstrong, 'your father's right. And since he takes that p'int of view, it's the duty of a good son to obey him.'

'I didn't expect you to side against me,' said the lad.

'Ma dearr boy,' returned the Scot, 'I'm not siding against you. I'm an independent observer. Just that, and nothing more. "Honour thy father, that thy days may be long in the land."'

'Armstrong's a man o' sense,' said Ezekiel, doggedly. 'He knows what's good for you, and he knows his own place, Armstrong does.'

'My man,' said Armstrong, as placidly as before, 'a fool's praise is sorer to bear than a wise man's blame. From your p'int of view, I'm more ignorant of my place than you'd guess me to be if you spent a month in trying.'

Ezekiel could not understand this all at once, and the northerner's inoffensive gaze and quiet speech disarmed him. The grey man's eyes had a smile in them, not of insolence or satire or triumph, but of pure humour. Yet he was rather a wistful-looking grey man, too. His clothes were shrunken and his figure was

bowed, and his face was familiar with the mingled expression of pain and patience.

'That's as maybe,' returned Ezekiel, guardedly. 'But i' the meanwhile, Job, you can mek out my meaning. About that, theer is no manner of a doubt. And Armstrong is of a mind wi' me. Them goings on must end.'

Armstrong put out a hand towards Job, and that stalwart youngster took it with an appealing glance. The grey man shook hands and walked away. Job and Ezekiel looked after him, and the bulldog yawned luxuriously, as though the going of a comparative stranger had been a relief to him, and he could relax from company manners.

'Come in, Job,' said the elder man, after a pause. 'I've got a thing or two to say to thee.' He led the way, and Job followed. A big fire, half obscured by ashes, slumbered in the wide high-shouldered grate in the kitchen, and a kettle was suspended by two or three pot-hooks from a crane above it. Ezekiel filled his pipe from a leaden coffin of a tobacco-box, and

stuck the bowl amidst the coals to get a light. The kitchen clock ticked harshly with a dictatorial tone like its owner's. There was nothing in the room with which Job had not been familiar from childhood, but he saw everything anew, and as if for the first time. He noticed then, and remembered afterwards, a crack in the ash-preventer below the fire-grate, and the grain of the woodwork where the paint had been rubbed away from the pillars which supported the high mantelshelf. He traced with the point of his walking-cane the outline of a greyhound on the cast-iron door of the oven, and discovered its absurd want of proportion.

'You have something to say to me, father?' he said, after a longish pause.

'A thing or two,' returned Ezekiel. 'One or two things.' The tick of the clock repeated 'one or—two things' a score of times before either of them spoke again.

'Say them, if you please.'

'You are,' said Ezekiel, pulling at his pipe, and speaking with great deliberation, 'I reckon,

the obst*ina*test and pigheadedest young feller in Castle Barfield.'

Job, with the point of his cane at the greyhound's nose, turned to look at his father. His lips were tight set, and his reddish-brown eyebrows knit themselves gloomily.

'Tek your hat off,' said Ezekiel.

Job obeyed, and, holding the hat in his left hand, went on tracing the greyhound's outline.

'Obstinate and pig-headed is your name and nature,' pursued Ezekiel.

The lad laughed, and his gleam of mirth, though momentary, was real.

'Go on,' he said gloomily a second later.

'I will go on,' returned Mr. Round, 'or I will not go on, accordin' as I please or displease, and not accordin' to any jackanapes's biddin'.' He kept silence for perhaps a minute, and so far mollified himself by this act of irritation that he could speak again: 'Pig-headed,' he observed, 'ain't the name for you.' Job bent closer over the blackleaded greyhound

and said nothing. 'J'ear what I'm a-saying'?' Ezekiel demanded.

'Distinctly,' answered Job.

'Now you mind *me*,' cried his father, shaking the pipe-stem at him as if it were a stick. 'I'm a man of his word—and that you'll find. If I ever ketch you a-mouching round Armstrong's house again, I've done with you.'

'Very well,' said Job, with mischief in the tone.

'If I ever ketch you with Armstrong's gell,' resumed Ezekiel, 'or hear talk o' you and Armstrong's gell a-bein' together, I've done with you.'

'Very well,' said Job.

'If you like to wed thirst to hunger, goo an' do it,' cried Ezekiel. 'But if you move beyand my words I've done with you, and you'll never see a penny o' my money.'

'Very well,' said Job, a third time.

'You've got my mind now, plain and straightforrad,' said the old man, 'and you're

theer to do what pleases you. I've got no more to say.'

'Then,' returned Job, with unfilial dryness, 'I can speak without fear of interrupting you. Money isn't everything in the world, and I don't want your money. I don't want to quarrel either. I don't think you're a very sensible man, father, or you'd know better than threaten me. You never found that pay, not even when I was a little chap and you used to thrash me. I don't want to quarrel. I should like to part friends. But I shall never change my mind or let my will break down for all the money in the world.' Ezekiel glared at him, too much enraged and astonished to say a word as yet. 'I wish to God,' said the lad, 'that you were poor. I'd work my fingers to the bone to keep you, and to let you want for nothing. But now you hold your money over me like a whip. What would you think of me if I went down on my knees to you every time you threaten me? I could never bear to look at my own face in the glass

again. I could never hold my head up in the street. Keep your money. Leave it where you like.'

It was in his mind and heart to say friendlier things than this, as the wet flash of his eyes declared. But it was not in his nature to be tender on the surface, and his voice was more defiant and less friendly than his heart. Ezekiel answered him with dogged passion:

'Mek your bed—mek your bed—and lie on it. For so you shall.'

'Leave your money where you like, father,' the lad said more gently; 'but let you and me be friends.'

'Wheer my money goes,' said Ezekiel, 'my liking goes. Mek your ch'ice, Job—here in this kitchen, now, this very minute. Mek your ch'ice betwixt William Armstrong's gell an' your own father.'

'I don't want to part,' answered the lad; 'I don't want to quarrel. You will be as sorry for this as I shall.'

'Are you a-setting-up to talk equal with

your father?' Ezekiel asked. 'Things is come to a pass, to be sure, when that happens. Mek your ch'ice, Job, this minute. If ever you speak to that gell again I disown you.'

'Good-bye, dad,' said Job, reaching out a hand to him. 'You may live my enemy if you like; but I'll part friendly.'

'Mek your bed,' the old man quavered fiercely; 'mek your bed, and lie on it.'

'You've settled that for me,' his son replied. 'I'm not for sale at the price you want to pay for me. There's no use in wasting words about it, father.'

'You're a defying me?' cried Ezekiel. 'Are you? What! *You*—a defying ME? Get outside my doors.'

'Take time to think over that, father. If I leave the house at your bidding now, I shall never come back into it.'

Ezekiel went at him storming, with curses, and the youngster, putting on his hat, walked out of the house and into the street. Ezekiel, with the bulldog behind him, followed and

raged from the doorstep. At the sound of his voice neighbours came to doors and windows, and the few passengers in the street paused in amazement. Job marched away with his gloves in one hand and his walking-cane in the other. The jaunty swagger of half an hour ago was gone, and he walked like a man bent on serious business.

How much the bulldog knew of the rights and wrongs of the case, no man may tell. He looked uncertainly from his master to the retreating figure of his master's son. For a second or two he actually whimpered in his indecision, but all on a sudden he made up his mind, and tore down the street in pursuit of Job. The young fellow with raised stick ordered him home, and Ezekiel shouted at him from the doorsteps. But the brute, having made his mind up, was neither to be cajoled nor threatened. He waited until Job had turned again, and then he followed.

'Go wheer you like,' shouted Ezekiel, advancing into the middle of the roadway to

be heard the better. 'Live wheer you like. Starve wheer you like. Niver darken my doors again!'

The upper end of Castle Barfield High Street heard this and wondered. It had been pretty well known that a growing coldness existed between father and son, but nobody had expected the family frost to flash into such flame as this, though the family volcano is popularly known to brood below an icy surface. Job heard his father's voice, and walked on steadily a little straighter than before. The bulldog paddled silently behind him, looking from side to side as if he knew that this was a leavetaking with familiar things.

Ezekiel re-entered the house and slammed the door behind him. Job heard the sound, and knew its meaning. It seemed to snap his life in two. The past was all dead and done with, and the new life began at that second.

The bulldog ran alongside and looked up at him appealingly.

'Do you want to stick to me, Pincher?'

asked Job, looking down at him. If ever an attitude answered a question, Pincher said 'Yes.' 'Come along, then,' said the lad, stooping to pat him. 'I bred you from a pup, and you have a right to stick to me. We'll face the world together, Pincher. There's a bit of Bite and Hold Fast in the pair of us, and I dare say we shall get along together very nicely.'

Pincher wagged his hindquarters—he was crop-tailed and limited as to expression—and the two went on together. The lad's underjaw projected a little when he was angry or resolved, and Pincher, as he ran alongside the newly-made adventurer, looked like a humble relative.

CHAPTER II.

At the lower end of Castle Barfield High Street, with but one or two houses between it and the Park wall, stood a house of two stories. Above the white-curtained domestic upper windows was painted in blistered and sun-faded letters the legend 'The Stanhope Press.' Below the domestic windows and above the business window the name of 'William Armstrong' went the way of all paint towards final obliteration. There were twenty-one panes of glass in the business window, seven from left to right, and three from top to bottom, and the central pane was illuminated with a device which announced the sale of all patented and family medicines within. When a customer entered at the low-browed shop-door, a cracked bell, hung upon a circular spring, rankled behind him until he had

made his purchase and gone out again, when the closing of the door set it going anew. Books no man in Castle Barfield bought, or desired to buy, grew mildewed on the shelves. Adam Smith was there, and Baxter kept him in dull company. The Works of Sir R. Steele, Now First Collected, might have claimed a more cheerful tomb than this, and The Dramatists of the Seventeenth Century, in thirteen volumes, looked as neglected and forlorn as the strictest moralist could wish them. Various sorts of printing papers, most of them in sad confusion, were piled high upon a back counter, and untidy packets of stationery ware, quill-pens with dusty feathers, cobwebbed ink-bottles, and what not, filled up the shelves which were unoccupied with books.

The place had an unprosperous look, and the grey man sitting behind the counter was at least in partial keeping with his surroundings. A casual onlooker could not be supposed to know it, but his head was lined with the contents of the books which lined his untidy

shelves. His grey hair and bits of grey side-whisker, and his shrunken clothes of undecided colour, were at one with the faded and unhopeful place. On the littered shelf behind him lay a book of chess, and his hand was stretched out backwards to hold the page open. The fingers of his disengaged hand drummed busily on his knee, and he half whistled in tuneless time to that accompaniment.

The shop-door, which always stuck a little and jarred on opening, was thrust back by a strong hand, and the shrill clatter of the bell awoke him from his study.

'Job, my lad,' he said rising. 'This is a very unwise defiance of authority. Let me serve you with something—a bundle of quills? —a bottle of writing-fluid?'

Job laid his hand upon the clattering bell and silenced it.

'It's all over between me and my father, sir, and I want to say something to you in private, if you please.'

'We're as private here,' said Armstrong,

with a droll glance about the place, 'as we should be in the Desert of Sahara.'

'More's the pity, sir,' answered Job. 'You ought to do a better trade if the people about here weren't such idiots. But it isn't that I came to speak about. I have left home, sir.'

Armstrong shook his head mournfully. 'Eh, dear, dear!' he said; 'the folly of the world is just incurable. Ye haven't time to bury the old fool before the young one 's flourishing.'

'Well, sir,' said Job, shifting one or two odds and ends on the counter as he spoke, 'I can't take the responsibility for this. My father put an alternative before me, Mr. Armstrong. He told me that I was never to enter your house again, or I must leave his. I haven't quarrelled with him. I don't believe I've said one bitter word to him. I said "Good-bye," that was all, and he cursed me a little way down the street —like a father.'

'Job, my lad,' said the grey shopkeeper,

with mournful earnestness, 'pocket your pride, and go home again.'

'It's of no use to talk about that, sir,' returned Job, firmly. 'I'm not a runaway. I'm not a wastrel. I think if I set myself to do it that I can make a living somehow. *You* won't think the worse of me, sir, because I couldn't make a dishonourable bargain?'

'Listen to me, Job, my lad,' said Armstrong. 'I thought until this afternoon, when your father spoke to me, that I was playing Gamaliel to your Paul, and that I was just forming your mind and your manners, and fitting you to fight the world and the flesh and the devil. Now I wake up, and I find that you're no more Paul than I am—ardent for knowledge—but just a Strephon sighing for a maid; and I'm no Gamaliel in a chair of authority, but just an old fool of a father in a chimney-corner. Now, listen to me. I never guessed the truth until an hour ago. When I came home I spoke to Mistress Armstrong—the vera pearl of candour—and she tells me I'm an ass or I'd

have seen it a year ago. Now, Job, I did *not* see it, and the first glimpse I ever had of it came from your father this afternoon. If I had seen it I should have put an end to it. Listen to me. It's not that I don't like you, and it's not that I think you'd make anything but a good husband when you grow up to be old enough to be thinking of such gauds as marriage. Listen to me. I'm not without pride in my own way, and it's just clean outside my powers o' fancy that I should let a girl o' mine marry into a household where her poverty would be despised. Now there's no man in Europe who despises poverty as your father does. He knows one earthly thing of value, and only one. That's money, or money's worth.'

'Well, sir,' said Job, 'all that might have been very true yesterday or this morning; but there's no money in the way now.' He threw his hands abroad with a half-embarrassed laugh. 'What I have to do now is to go out into the world and make a living. I'm as poor,

sir, as even you would desire a son-in-law to be.'

'What's the amount of your father's fortune?' asked Armstrong.

'I don't know, sir,' said Job. 'He never told me, and I never asked him.'

'Well, it's said to be ten thousand pounds.'

'I dare say,' Job responded. 'Don't let that trouble you, sir. I shall never touch a penny of it, now.'

'That's a rare hatful of money, Job, my lad,' said Armstrong. 'There's no woman in the world that's worth it. If she were the loveliest of her sex, and the wisest and worthiest, there would be a thousand so near her perfections, d'ye see, that you might spend a lifetime and find no difference in their value. Man, there's not a street in England that hasn't a good woman in it. They're just as plenty as blackberries, and nearly as like one another. No man need be lonely for want of a good woman to marry him—not if he were a fool, or a Gorgon, or a cripple. A good

woman has every virtue under the sun except discernment, and she's ready to love anybody that thinks her an inch or two over the ordinar. But all this is barren philosophy to you, lad. Here's the plain moral of it. Put your pride in your pocket. Go home and make peace with your father. Fall in love judiciously; marry in your own station; close the old man's eyes when his time comes, and give thanks when you do it that you knew one sensible man who gave you the benefit of his own wisdom and experience.'

'You're more cruel than you mean to be, Mr. Armstrong,' said Job. 'I have parted with my father, sir, and there is nothing in the world which can bring us together again. He ordered me from the house, and he cursed me from the door. I don't ask anything more than this,' he hurried on: 'let me find employment, and when I have found it, let me see Grace now and then until I am in a position to offer her a home.'

'Job Round,' said Armstrong, 'listen to

me. I'll have neither part nor lot in the division of father and son. I'll be no instrument to hold father and son asunder. I like you too well to be your enemy. There'll be a reconciliation in a day or two, or a week or two, if the oreeginal *casus belli* doesn't continue to stand between you.'

'No, sir,' cried the youngster, 'there's no reconciliation possible.'

'Hoots, man!' said Armstrong, calmly. 'Who are you for a judge o' possibilities? You're one in the quarrel, and you're blinded with your own ire.'

Job gave an impatient groan. 'Do try to understand me, Mr. Armstrong. I have thrown up everything to come and ask you this one thing. What should take me back to my father? Respect? He deserves none. Affection? He never gave me a chance to have any. His money? Not if he were richer than Crœsus!'

'Now, lad, lad,' said the philosopher, severely. 'You're past your tether. You're

clean broken loose and gone into the realms o' madness. No respect for your father? No affection for the man that begot you and bred you—your own lonely old flesh and blood that hasn't a soul in the warld beside you? Man, I'm ashamed of you. But you're angry, and a man in anger is a man beside himself.'

The lad looked straight before him over Armstrong's head, with that dogged chin of his thrust forward. One foot beat tattoo on the floor, and one hand kept time to it on the counter. He had surrendered everything for love and honour—he felt that he would have been base beyond his own contempt if he had acted otherwise—and here it was all set at naught and treated as if it were a trifle.

'I can wait a day or two, sir,' he said at length. 'I suppose I ought not to have come here hot from my quarrel. Can I see you again by-and-by?'

'Better not, lad,' said Armstrong, 'better not. I like you well, Job, but I'd rather say good-bye till you're married and settled. Good-

bye, lad, and God bless you! An old man's blessing hurts nobody. Go home and make your peace with the father there, and I'll think more of you than I will of him that taketh a city.'

The grey shopkeeper was assured of his own wisdom, and his advice was no doubt admirable. But to the youngster it had this serious drawback—it was impossible to follow it. Armstrong looked at his chess-book. He believed he had found a flaw in a problem, and his mind went back to the study from which he had been diverted. The noble game had kept him poor, and now that he was old he was almost friendless. Castle Barfield was not rich in fine chess-players; a Scotchman in that Black Country parish was half a foreigner; and an abstracted fellow who seemed to sleep with his eyes open was not likely to be popular. Whilst he stood there with a living grievance before him, and troubles enough of his own within, his eyes began to look far away, his hand began to paddle on the counter in shuf-

fling accompaniment to his windy and untuneful whistle, and he was lost to outer things. Job knew the signs and sighed savagely. In a minute or so he began to pace up and down the little shop, and Armstrong's eyes seemed to follow him with a mechanical indifference.

Suddenly the cracked bell clanked and tinkled madly, and in burst Ezekiel in a tall unbrushed beaver-hat and a bottle-green coat with brass buttons.

'Ha!' he said, glaring angrily at Job. 'I had a sort of a notion as I might find thee here. Armstrong!' The shopkeeper was awake again. 'My word's as good as my bond, and allays was and allays will be. This young upstart 's a pauper. Mind that. He can wed wheer he likes, and please me. He can wed a wench from the brick-hill if so he wool, or out of the gutter if he likes it. I've done wi' him. From this out, he's no son o' mine.'

The shop-door was open, and two or three people were staring in from the street. Arm-

strong passed round the counter and shut out these observers.

'I'll just beg ye to obsairve,' he said, 'that my shop 's no beear-garden.'

'If your gell likes to wed him, let her,' cried Ezekiel; 'I've done wi' him.'

'Hold your tongue, ye poor demented creature,' said Armstrong. 'You're both with infuriate passion blind. I've told Job here that I'll not allow myself to stand between father and son. I've told him, as gently as I could, that I'll be no party to the making of a quarrel. Now I'll ask you two people to shake hands and get away home together. Job will come here no more, till he's comfortably married and settled, and then we shall be glad to see him.'

'Oh!' said Ezekiel, with a jeer. 'That's how the land lies, is it? You could have him here and mek a pet on him while he was good for poor old 'Zekiel's money. Now theer's no chance o' that left, and you can send him packin'. Eh? that's your game, is it?'

'You asked me a minute or two ago,' said Job to Armstrong, 'to respect my father.'

'The man *is* your father,' said the shopkeeper. 'It's not your place to emphasise his follies.'

'Nor to stand by and swallow the disgrace of them,' said the youngster, bitterly. 'I'm going.'

But Ezekiel set himself between his son and the door.

'So you've got the sack from both placen,' he began. 'Now tek a father's blessing.'

With that he became unreportable; but Job stood still to listen, and looked the old man in the face with eyes which cowed him after a time.

'Y' inhuman blackguard!' said Armstrong, with quiet scorn.

'Good-bye, Mr. Armstrong,' said Job, when the torrent of his father's speech was stayed. 'Come along, Pincher.'

'Shassent tek my dog wi' thee,' cried Ezekiel, being free of his son's eyes. He

dashed at Pincher; but that intelligent brute had already made his choice, and he recoiled with a look so menacing that Ezekiel thought better of it. 'You've p'isoned the very dog agen me,' he said, as he drew back again.

Job, with his head up and his dogged chin stuck forward, walked round his father and opened the shop-door. The observers outside withdrew their noses from the window-panes, and stared at him as he walked into the street and took his way in the opposite direction to that in which lay his old home.

'Do you know what you've done this bitter day, man?' said Armstrong. 'You've made yourself childless.'

Ezekiel only stared at him, and the cracked bell went on tinkling.

'You're just a fool, you, with your money.'

'Betwigst the two on us,' said Mr. Round, with something of a discomfited air, 'Job's sot down on his backend. That's what he's done.'

'Fetch him back,' cried Armstrong, 'whilst

there's time. I know the lad: if once he gets away, there'll be no changing him.'

Ezekiel's heart sank a little, but he laughed contemptuously. 'Fetch him back? With a hoss-whip. I've told him niver to darken *my* doors again, and what I say I stick to.'

He moved to the door and looked out. The cracked bell gave its last tinkle, and his son's figure disappeared at the bend of the road. The road looked curiously blank, and, though Ezekiel was not an imaginative man by nature, he saw his house empty at that moment, and his heart felt chilled. That, of course, only made it the more necessary that he should harden himself, and he walked into the street, bulldog all over. It struck him as he went homeward that he and Job had their backs turned to each other, and were further apart at every step. That also made it the more necessary that he should harden himself. He had triumphed—he had turned Job out of doors, and had been true to his word; but, howsoever comforting that reflection of itself

might be, he felt that he stood in need of it, and his triumph was after all a bad bargain. Since he was a man unused to combat with himself, and, as a rule, could keep conscience in a state of admirable discipline, this condition of things annoyed him, and there seemed no more natural outlet for this natural feeling of displeasure than to swear at Job. He cursed Job—tautologically, with fluency, but without variety or heartiness, and it did him less good than might have been expected.

Job, meanwhile, marched steadily away townwards, with Pincher paddling at his heels. Everybody was against him, and he might, at least, have expected Armstrong's help and friendship. He had thrown away everything, and Armstrong seemed to think it all a trifle. Very well, he should find that it was no trifle. He—Job—would suffer, and the people he left behind should be sorry for themselves. He was not less open than other men to the influence of persuasion—or so at least he told himself. A physiognomist looking at that

resolute lower jaw of his, and the grim meeting of his lips, might have been excused for forming another opinion. But any man—so he told himself again—who tried to drive him would find the task a hard one. To be bullied and browbeaten, and, worse than all, to be threatened with such a lash of cobwebs as the loss of money! As if he cared for all the money in the world as a bribe against—affection. Well, yes, affection—and perhaps self-will. He knew his faults, and perhaps he was a little inclined to be obstinate. Perhaps obstinacy might be useful to him. The world was obstinate enough, and a man had generally to hold on and worry, bulldog fashion, before he could get out of it the thing he wanted.

He tramped along with these thoughts in his mind, and in an hour's time the great town began to enfold him. Its environs were dingy, and the fringe of houses which surrounded it was scattered and broken. Walking from Castle Barfield the itinerant was accustomed

to look on the Turk's Head as the first house in town, and it was not an uncommon thing for him to pause there. Job pulled up for a glass of home-brewed ale, and found himself side by side with a yokel, in smock-frock and cords, who, with one elbow on the pewter counter, tried to look *dégagé* and disinterested, whilst he listened to the patter of a recruiting sergeant. The yokel's face was flushed with beer and excitement, and the sergeant straddled across the little bar with his riding-whip at the back of his shoulders and an end of it in either hand. His spurs, his scarlet coat, his polished buttons, the handful of parti-coloured ribbons that fluttered from his cap, made the sergeant a noble figure, and his pose was easy and commanding.

'A lad like *you*!' said the sergeant, surveying the yokel's lumpy proportions with admiring eye. 'Why, God bless my soul, you'd be a-ordering *me* about in six months' time. Join us, my boy, and I only hope I shall live till you're a general.'

'Have a drink, sergeant?' said Job.

'Why, thankee, sir,' said the man of war, 'I don't mind if I do. A little spot of rum, William, with a squeeze of lemon in it. Neat, William.' He swung into a new attitude, and poked the rustic in the ribs by the way. 'For a lad like you, the army's the only thing. Why, when I was quartered in the city of Cork —it's this day twelve months, as I'm a sinner —there was a lad on Cat's Hill, the very spit of you, a handsome young fellow, as like you as two peas, a-talking to an Irish girl; and just as I walked by, says she, "Not for me, Michael. That's the sort of man for my taste. My life on the spurs," she says. "Why," says he; "I'm as good a man as that, any day." "So you are, my lad," says I. "Show a sperit," I says, "and come and join us." He took the shillin' there and then, and where d'ye think that lad is now? Why, when I saw him last he was the colonel's orderly. What d'ye think of that for a rise in life, eh?' The rustic took a contemplative pull at the pewter,

and then grinned uneasily. 'My respects, sir,' said the sergeant, nodding at Job.

'I say,' said Job, suddenly laying a hand on the yokel's shoulder, 'I think I know you, young fellow.'

'I think you don't, young feller,' replied the rustic.

'I think I do,' said Job. 'Your name's Wigmore, and you live at the Pear Tree Farm. I thought so. Now don't you 'list, even to be a colonel's orderly,' with a keen look at the sergeant. 'And don't you humbug the lad, sergeant, even for the sake of earning three half-crowns.'

'I warn't a-going to 'list,' said the youthful Wigmore. There is something at once disgraceful and enticing in enlistment to the rustic mind. Before Job's entry he had been bent upon it, and the sergeant had felt sure of him; but now he finished his beer, and shuffled out with a shamefaced nod, a saved yokel. The sergeant looked black, and straightened his shoulders with an affronted air.

'Don't make backs at me,' said Job. 'Have another drink? You shan't lose your three half-crowns, either.'

'Why, are you game to join?' asked the sergeant, turning, and radiant again.

Job shook his head. 'No, lad, I want better pay than you can offer. But there's your money all the same. You'd have had that young fool if I hadn't come in, and I don't want to spoil any man's game.'

The sergeant stared, and, not being a very lofty man below the scarlet and the ribbons, he took the money. Job sipped his glass of beer very slowly, and the sergeant, having commanded a further supply of rum, sipped very slowly also, and the quiet was unbroken. The barman had retired, and the place, except for Job and the sergeant, was deserted.

'Excuse me,' said the soldier, touching Job's elbow, 'but are you sure you don't want to join us?'

Job looked at him oddly.

'Excuse me,' said the sergeant again, 'but

why I ask, you chuck your money about pretty free, but you don't look over-jolly neither. There's worse things done every day, and a good deal greener. A man like you, as is well set up by nature, and knows how to do his duty, why he rises in the service like a rocket.'

Now the British army at that time did not open the best of all possible avenues to an honourable ambition. Bad as things are to-day, they have prodigiously mended of late years, and Job knew a thing or two for which the sergeant gave him no credit. Yet what was not common with the crowd might happen with him, and the fisher of men offered him a taking bait. When a man has no more than a pound in his pocket, and knows no way of earning a penny, he is fit to do more desperate things than enlist in the army, and the adventurer had had that way out of his difficulties pretty clearly before him ever since he and his father had turned their backs on each other.

'The pay's a shilling a day, I believe,' said Job, sardonically.

'Well, it's a trifle over that even to begin with,' returned the sergeant, 'and you wouldn't be on that long. Why, look at me. You're a man with a better education than ever I've had, and a better headpiece I *should* say by the look of you. There's nothing in the world agen your chance of rising if you care to join. Why, a figure like yours is a point to begin with. Don't you believe, now, that our colonel isn't a smart man, because he is, and he's down on a man of merit in a day.'

'You needn't say any more,' said Job, and the sergeant's hopes fell to zero, though they had risen for a moment, fanned by the warm breeze of his own eloquence. 'I'm not to be humbugged into it; but I'll take my chance with the ruck. Give me the shilling, sergeant.'

'Are you married?' asked the sergeant, plunging into formula.

'No,' said Job.

'Are you an apprentice?'

'No. Do I look like one?'

'Bound to ask. Are you over six-and-twenty?'

'Twenty-two last birthday.'

At this moment in burst half a dozen noisy carters. The sergeant went silent, and winked at his prey with a faint sideway nod. The prey took the hint, finished his beer, and went out. The man of war, with no sign of collusion, followed shortly afterwards, and crossing the street made for an entry between two dilapidated houses, Job and Pincher at his heels. Then in a frowsy backyard, sheltered from observation by a seven-foot wall, he continued his interrogatory.

'Ever been refused for the service?'

'No.'

'Aware of any malady which might send you back when you come before the surgeon?'

'No.'

'Then, what corps would you like to join? You don't want to join a foot regiment, of course. A man like you wants to be among a gentlemanly set, that's natural.'

A head appeared above the seven-foot wall.

'Don't you believe a word that cove's a-saying,' said the head's owner. 'That kind o' cove 'll tell you anythink.'

'Never mind that fool,' said the sergeant.

'I don't mind him,' returned Job.

'You'll wish you had,' said the intruder, and disappeared.

'Now, a dragoon regiment is the thing for you,' the sergeant resumed in a lower and more confidential tone, 'and you can't do better than choose mine. I shouldn't like to lose sight of you for one thing. I've took a fancy to you, and I should like to meet again.'

'What's the regiment?'

'The —th Dragoon Guards, the finest in the service. There's His Majesty's shilling. I enlist you in His Majesty's service for the term of eighteen years.'

That sounded chill upon the listener's heart, and he heard nothing further except the murmur of the sergeant's voice. But the shilling

was between his fingers, and the deed was done.

'Now you don't want,' began the sergeant again, 'to join the corps in a set-out like that. I'll take that suit of yours at a reasonable valuation, and give you another for it as 'll be quite good enough to travel in.'

Job declined this thoughtful offer. He had no mind to enter the barracks like a scarecrow. At least, the sergeant supposed, with an injured look, that this was not to be a dry bargain. He had never, he said, known a dry bargain to prosper. Job was willing to moisten the bargain, but he tucked His Majesty's shilling safely away. He would keep that, and would wear it on his watch-chain when he was Captain Round, and show it for the encouragement of young soldiers.

'The court isn't sitting now,' said the sergeant. 'It's too late for to-day, but you'll have to be sworn in to-morrow. You can sleep at the barracks if you like, or you can sleep outside if you like; but if you're not at the

barracks at nine o'clock in the morning you'll be liable to prosecution as a rogue and a vagabond. Is that your dog, by the way?' He eyed Pincher like a connoisseur.

'Yes,' said Job; 'that's my dog.'

'You'll have to get rid of him,' said the sergeant. 'He looks a bit o' blood, too, that dog does.'

'Oh,' returned Job, quietly, 'I shan't part with the dog.'

'By gad, you will, though,' said the sergeant. 'They'll see about that at the barracks cursed smart. You see if they won't.'

Job stuck out that obstinate underjaw of his and fell a-thinking. He had pledged himself to Pincher from the moment when that intelligent brute had chosen between his old and his present master. He had since then pledged himself to His Sacred Majesty King William the Fourth—an affair, on the face of things, much more important. The two pledges seemed likely to contradict each other. By-and-by the young man smiled. He beheld, in vision,

the attempt to remove the unwilling Pincher from the master of his choice, and the vision soothed him.

The sergeant strutted by his side in something of a huff, but the prospective drink mollified him.

'What d'ye say to a drop at the barrack canteen?' he asked a minute or two later. 'You'll meet a pal or two there, fellows as has joined your corps. They start for head-quarters the day after to-morrow, so you'll have no time to wait.'

'Where are head-quarters?' asked Job.

'Dublin,' returned the sergeant. 'Ah, you're just beginning to see the world!' He cast an occasional eye on Pincher. 'I'll give you a guinea for that dog,' he said at last.

'Thank you,' said Job; 'he's worth twenty.'

'You'll have to part with him, you know,' said the sergeant. 'You can't keep him. That's rot, you know, the notion of keeping him is.'

'I shall see,' said Job. The more he looked at it the less he liked it, but he was bound. He had taken His Majesty's money, and he must obey his rules.

He slept that night in barracks, and Pincher was curled below the bedstead on which he lay. He began to think the dog might pass unnoticed. Next day he was examined by the surgeon, sworn in at the police-court, and put on rations. He spent his free time in wanderings about the streets, choosing quarters where he was least likely to be known. Pincher followed him everywhere, and the lad's sore heart fastened to him more and more. He was all that was left of old times, and he had attached himself to the wanderer of his own free will. It was not in nature to part with him.

Next day, in company with a score of recruits bound for Ireland, and a contingent of infantry some fifty strong, he marched towards Bristol. Some of the men were scarecrows, all were stupid and ribald. Job's heart was less

fierce against his father than it had been, and he had never felt so tender to his friends or to the sweetheart he was leaving behind him. Pincher marched alongside, and nobody made any remark about him. The officer in charge spoke to Job once or twice, questioned him, and advised him kindly; but one or two of the non-commissioned officers were brutes, and his blood boiled a hundred times before his share of the march was over.

They were in the western country, and if he could have undertaken the tramp alone he would have found it pleasant. The weather was lovely and not too warm, the beautiful country seemed to smile softly all around him. But his companions poisoned the sweet air with abominable songs and sayings, and his heart burned with loathing.

So on to Gloucester, and at Job's billet there a grizzled old non-com. came round and observed Pincher.

'Whose dog is that?'

'Mine,' said Job.

'Send him packing,' said the old fellow, grimly.

'He's not in anybody's way,' returned Job, quietly, but in a sort of rage at heart. 'He's a valuable dog, and when I get to headquarters, if I can't keep him myself, perhaps one of the officers might care to have him.'

'Young man,' said the grizzled sergeant-major, 'you've made a mistake. The service isn't a hospital for female convalescents, and we don't allow lap-dogs. Send the brute packing.'

'Send him packing yourself,' said Job, with a grimness equal to the old fellow's own.

The sergeant-major raised his stick, and Pincher, with a look exceeding dour, drew his lips a little back, and growled.

'Quiet, Pincher,' cried Job, and the stick was lowered slowly and with caution.

The intending assailant withdrew, and Job triumphed unreasonably and before his time. In five minutes the grizzled authority was back again.

'You've got to-night to get rid of him in,' he said, looking round the edge of the door. 'If he tries to follow to-morrow he'll be shot.'

'Will he?' cried Job, jumping to his feet.

'He will,' said the old fellow, viciously, and again withdrew.

For a moment this statement alarmed the youngster, but in the next he laughed at it. It seemed too absurd to fancy a line of British soldiers called out to shoot a dog because he insisted on following a recruit to barracks. Nobody in authority would dream, or do more than dream, of such a folly. So Job possessed his heart in quiet, and that night slept in peace. Next morning Pincher came down stairs with Job, and sat, with the majesty of unconscious courage upon him, at the door of the little inn. Job was scarcely so trim as he had been a few days earlier, for travelling afoot without baggage will have a deteriorating effect upon the smartest of young men, but he was able to borrow blacking-brushes and a razor from the kit of a friendly regular, and he was smartening

himself as best he could when he heard a voice at the door.

'That's the brute, sir.'

'Filthy-looking beast,' said another voice, 'have him drowned.'

Out came Job immediately, with a brush in one hand and his hat in the other. There was the grizzled old fellow of last night again, and with him a young officer with a pinched and supercilious face.

'This is the man that owns him, sir,' said the sergeant-major, indicating Job. The officer looked at the youngster with cold arrogance and turned away.

'Have the brute drowned at once,' he said.

The recruit's heart beat hard, but he stepped forward with outward composure, and bowed civilian-fashion to his officer.

'I beg your pardon, sir. Will you allow me a word?' The other turned his insolent eyes slowly on the petitioner and stared at him with an unchanging look. 'My dog is not in

anybody's way. He is an exceedingly valuable animal, and I hope that at headquarters I shall find some one of the officers who will be kind enough to accept him.'

He extended his hands as he spoke with the natural gesture of a man who asks a favour.

'Stand at attention,' returned the officer. 'Sergeant-major, have that brute drowned if he attempts to follow the detachment.'

Job threw the brush into the passage of the little hostel, and put on his hat. Then he whistled to Pincher and walked quietly away.

'Where's that fellow going? Halt!' cried the officer. Job walked on with Pincher at his heels. The officer ran forward and caught him up. 'Halt!' he cried again. Job looked neither to left nor right, but walked on as if he neither saw nor heard. The young officer in his wrath lost his dignity, and seized the departing recruit by the arm.

'You mean to drown my dog?' asked Job, stopping short.

'Put this man under arrest,' said the officer, 'and drown that beast at once.'

There was enough in the situation to quicken thought, and in less than a second Job Round saw his position from two or three different standpoints, so that when he knocked the officer down he did it on comparatively mature reflection. There was but one way in which he could keep faith with Pincher, and breach of faith meant death to him. To keep his engagement with a bulldog he must break a solemn promise to the King's Most Excellent Majesty. The value of the two engagements looked hugely disproportionate, and to Job's mind the weight was all on Pincher's side. So he knocked the officer down and bolted, with a shout to the dog to follow. There were wide grass-fields a hundred yards away, and the street which led to them was free of passengers. Before the grizzled sergeant-major had turned out the two or three regulars in pursuit, Job had leaped the second hedge. The men streamed along after him, and a dozen volun-

teers joined the chase hotly. But the deserter ran like a deer, and his start of two hundred yards was lengthened into three and then into four. They stood to watch him until he leaped a high hedge, and dropping on lower land on the other side disappeared from view, and then they trailed back to the billet of last night, and found exercise for all the comminatory eloquence of the sergeant-major.

Job heard the last sound of the hunt fade away behind him, and crouching under the tall hedge saw the pursuers returning.

'Come along, Pincher,' he said, gasping hard. 'You stuck to me, and I'll stick to you. We're rogues and vagabonds now, the pair of us.'

CHAPTER III.

In those days three copies of the 'Times' used to reach Castle Barfield one day after publication, and all passed through the hands of William Armstrong, printer, stationer, newsvendor, and bookseller. The rector's copy was called for with clockwork punctuality by the rector's serving-man, the great employer's copy was despatched by messenger, and the readers at the Castle Barfield Institution for the Advancement of Christian Knowledge waited as a general thing until the newsvendor had gone through the 'Times' columns at his leisure.

Job's disappearance saddened Armstrong. It was no fault of his that the lad had turned his back on the parish he was born in; yet wiser words, or a little more kindness, might have kept him back. The shopkeeper felt as if a son of his own were out in the cold.

The cracked bell tinkled on the shop-door one evening fourteen days after Job's departure, and the rector's man and Armstrong's errand-boy came in together. The boy intercepted the mail-cart at the post-office daily, and the rector's man always met him. Armstrong woke from his fancies, opened the little parcel, surrendered one journal to the boy, another to the servant, and himself opened and folded back the third. By chance something in the columns of advertisements—scantier then than now—caught his attention, and he strayed up and down amongst them, trifling with his appetite and using the publishers' announcements as a sort of *hors d'œuvre*. All on a sudden he read one little paragraph at a glance. It began with a 'Whereas' in large type, and ended with 'the above reward,' in small, and between the two it told a story which Armstrong seemed to read by a kind of inspiration. 'John Smith, six feet one inch in height, chest measurement forty-one inches, age two-and-twenty, hair red, eyes grey and large, had enlisted in the town

of Birmingham on the fifteenth instant, and had on the twenty-second deserted in the city of Gloucester, after committing a brutal assault upon one Captain Coninghame. Was respectably attired in civilian costume, and accompanied by a bulldog answering to the name of Pincher. Any person giving such information as would lead to the apprehension of the said John Smith should receive on application to Messrs. Begg & Bagg, of Chancery Lane, London, solicitors to the aforesaid Captain Coninghame, the sum of fifty guineas.'

'The lad's clean ruined,' sighed Armstrong, dropping the paper on his knees, 'and a fugitive from the face of justice.'

The bulldog answering to the name of Pincher would have banished doubt at once, if any room had existed for doubt to find a foothold upon. A John Smith who stood Job Round's height, carried his age, wore his hair, and looked out of his eyes, and who, moreover, enlisted in His Majesty's service on the day of

Job's departure, wore a thin disguise indeed to Armstrong's fancy.

'A sore heart,' said Armstrong, half aloud, 'is oftentimes an angry heart, and the lad went away wounded to the quick. I might have seen a way to hinder it. Any way, there is no reason why this ill-news should travel round the parish if I can help it. It's a poor precaution, but I'll take it.'

He folded the paper firmly, and in such wise that the advertisement came to the edge. Then with a wet finger he rubbed at it until John Smith and the dog which answered to the name of 'Pincher' went out of being so far as that copy was concerned. It looked as if the journal had been frayed in travelling.

'There'll be no gossip at the reading-room at least,' he said as he surveyed his work. It was growing dusk, and he began to light the dull shop lamps. As he fixed the last, and laid a hand upon the paper, the street-door opened, and a buxom woman entered, with a quaint figure in her rear.

'Shut the door, Clem,' said the buxom woman. 'How be you, Mr. Armstrong, and how's the missis?'

'Pretty well,' he answered. 'And how's Mistress Bache? Is that Clement? The lad's growing finely.'

'Come and shake hands wi' Mr. Armstrong, Clem.'

The odd figure came into the light, and reached a hand like a blanched claw across the counter. Armstrong bent over and took it gently, looking downwards at a mere child of seven or eight, with an aged face, and a form so twisted and distorted that it excited almost as much surprise as pity.

'Well, Clement! How's all with you?'

'I've been pretty well for a day or two, thank you, sir,' said Clement, smiling.

'That's hearty, lad, that's hearty,' said the bookseller. 'You'll be for more books now, I'll be bound. You'll have done with the "Animated Nature," eh?'

'Not yet, sir,' the child answered; 'I should like to keep it longer, if you'll let me.'

'Ay, ay, lad, keep it as long as you need it. Come in, Mistress Bache. Come in, Clement. Mistress Armstrong will be glad to see you.'

A door at the back of the shop opened into a sterile apartment, which had no air of habitual occupation. The furniture was wrapped in clinging cerements, and the air of the room was chill. Beyond this family sarcophagus lay the kitchen, a room all warmth and brightness. Here the young male Armstrongs sat at a big table, each with his hands buried in his hair, and a book at his nose. The young female Armstrongs sat at the side of the hearth, on which a small but clear fire was burning. They burn fires all the year round in the coal countries. All rose to greet the new comers, and Mrs. Armstrong, at the sound of voices, emerged from a pantry, which was built out in one corner of the room, and shook hands warmly.

In the brighter light the child's face, though prematurely aged, showed a beauty of

its own. His eyes were large and of a lovely brown, and his whole expression was intelligent and docile. Mouth and chin were especially sweet in expression, and his thick brown curls clustered close about a head of perfect form, and framed a forehead both broad and lofty. Armstrong patted his brown curls gently, and the three girls knelt about him and kissed him. By-and-by he escaped them, and made for a big-nosed lad at the table.

'What are you reading, David?'

'Oh!' said David, with the prolonged drawl of the district, 'It's about a fellow as bolted away from home, like Job Round.'

The eldest Miss Armstrong dissolved in tears, and the boy's mother made a dash at him. The offender dived with great dexterity, and evaded chastisement.

'Go and mind the shop, David,' said his father.

David withdrew, with a beckoning finger extended to the child, who followed him.

'Should you like to hear a tale, Clem?'

'Yes. Tell me that one about Friar Tuck and the Black Knight.'

'Oh, blow them. D'ye know the Keffel of Gabdad?'

'No,' said Clem, settling himself nestlingly at the other's knees; 'tell it.'

David thereupon began to relate one of the better-known adventures of the great Haroun Alraschid, and in a while Clem broke in:

'I know that. They lit all the lights in the grand pavilion where the fair Persian lived. Job told me. Only *he* called it the Caliph of Bagdad.'

'Oh, bother the naäm,' said David. 'When I'm readin' a tale I niver stop for the naäms.'

'I shouldn't like not to know Job's name now he's gone away,' said Clem, wistfully.

'What's he got to do with it?' asked David.

'Why, it's like that,' Clem answered, too vaguely for David's apprehension. 'Do you think Job'll come back again?'

'I dunno,' said David. 'Our Grace is allays bustin' out a-cryin' if you talk about him.'

'Perhaps she liked him,' said Clem, doubtfully.

'You're a rum un, Clem,' remarked David, rubbing his own big nose in a thoughtful way. 'You ain't like a young un. You're like a old un.'

'Tell me about Friar Tuck and the Black Knight,' said Clem. 'I know the other one, and you never finished that.'

David began on the Friar's singing and the Black Knight thundering at the door. He reduced Sir Walter to the Castle Barfield idiom, but the translation was spirited and veracious. It held them both spell-bound for half an hour, and in the meantime their elders in the kitchen talked of things in general, and avoided mention of Job Round. Things had gone so prosperously with the boys that the Black Knight was doing nothing in the lists in a new series of his adventures, when the

cracked bell tinkled for the first time on their ears, and Mr. Ezekiel Round entered.

'Gi' me a shillin' bottle o' writin'-flewid,' said Ezekiel.

The boy shrieked 'Father,' through the open door at the back of the shop, and Armstrong came in placidly from his perusal of yesterday's news, with his spectacles pushed up on his forehead. He did not at first notice Ezekiel, but stood vacantly pushing things about the counter, and waiting for a statement of the customer's desires.

'Gi' me a shillin' bottle o' writin'-flewid,' said Ezekiel again. Armstrong peered at him doubtfully, and, being sure of him, began to rummage on the shelves. 'Send them childern into the house,' Ezekiel said a moment later, and Armstrong despatched them by a wave of the hand.

'What's your will?' he asked.

'Have you heard anything from my son Job?' inquired Ezekiel hoarsely.

'Not a word,' answered the stationer.

Ezekiel fidgeted with his watch seals and the loose coin in his pocket. 'You're learning wisdom like the rest of us?' said Armstrong.

'I thought you might ha' done,' said Ezekiel; 'an' I called to tell you, once for all, mind you, as, if you did, you could tell him as he needn't expect nothing out o' me.'

'You're just hungering for a word from the lad!' cried Armstrong.

'Not me,' replied Ezekiel. 'If he writes to you, you can tell him as I'm done wi' him. Done wi' him, for good and all.'

'Man,' said the Scotchman, 'but I'm sorry for you. Ye may hear of him again, but I'm sore afraid ye'll meet no more. You've driven the puir lad to desperation.' He moved away to close the door, and returning leaned across the counter, and spoke in a solemn murmur: 'He's proclaimed. There's a price of fifty guineas upon his head. Man, man,' he broke out suddenly, 'it's hard upo' ye, though ye desairved it. He'll never write to ye to beg your help, for I know his dour heart o'er well. Ye'll

see your flesh and blood no more, Ezekiel Round, and ye cut it away and passed it through the fire unto Moloch with your own hand.'

'What's he done?' demanded Ezekiel, in dismay.

'He enlisted,' Armstrong whispered, 'the day he left this, under the name of John Smith, and on the fifteenth of this present month. On the twenty-second he assaulted an officer and deserted, and there's a price of fifty guineas upon his head.'

Ezekiel sat down upon a pile of printing paper.

'That's a sore shame,' he said, 'to befall a daycent family.'

'If ever he writes to me, and he may well do that,' said Armstrong, 'I'll let ye see the letter. He'll be sad and sore and sorry many'll be the time or ever he wins back to Castle Barfield.'

'He mon't look for nothin' from me,' cried Ezekiel, rising.

'Then look you,' returned Armstrong, 'for nothing from Heaven in your distresses.'

Ezekiel breathed hard at him, and lifting the unbrushed beaver, mopped his forehead with a red cotton handkerchief.

'You're a hard feller, Armstrong,' he said at last. The stationer had slipped down his spectacles to look at him, and shook his head at this mournfully.

'I'm hard?' he said. 'Well, maybe I'm harder on you than one poor mortal has a right to be upon another. But you'd anger a wise man, let alone a fool like me. Why, man, I see through you like a pane o' glass. You're just wretched at home, and ye think, "I'll get down to Armstrong and see if he knows aught about my lad that I drove out o' the house like a dog, a fortnight back"; and ye come here, if it weren't for your own pig-headed pride, ready to take him back to your heart, and then ye've the impudence to tell me that ye're in as silly a pet as ye were when I last saw ye. Hoots, man! when I know all the while that

ye long to see him, and would give a thousand pounds never to have quarrelled with him.'

'I wouldn't gi' twopence,' growled Ezekiel.

'There, there,' said Armstrong, almost snappishly. 'Take away your writing-fluid, if that's what ye cam' for. And when I hear from Job, if ever I do, I'll refrain from troubling you about him.'

'If my son 's that onfilial,' said Ezekiel, 'as he can't write to his own father, I bain't a-going to trouble no more about him.'

'Take your purchased goods,' returned Armstrong, 'and leave my shop.'

'It ain't no wonder,' said Ezekiel, 'as you ain't got a better trade, if that's how you talk to your customers.'

Armstrong's anger vanished at this, and he smiled outright.

'I am like the melancholy Jaques, Mr. Round,' he said; 'it is meat and drink to me to see a——man of your mental build.'

'There's no meanin' in half the things as you say,' returned Mr. Round. 'I'll tek the

writin'-flewid wi' me, and theer's your shilling. If Job writes to you, you can tell him as I've done wi' him for good an' all. He's got naught to look for from me. He took me at a word, and he left my house, an' now he'll ha' to stop away.'

The buxom woman appeared, with Clem's pitiful figure behind her. She bade Armstrong good-night in a hurried and frightened way, and bobbed a reluctant curtsey at Ezekiel, who knew himself the cause of her tremor. He was not so dull but he could see how people looked askance at him.

'Hillo!' he said clumsily; 'is that thee, Clem? I've got a sixpince somewhere. Ah, here it is! Here's a sixpince for thee, Clem.'

But Clem drew back from him in undisguised fear and aversion, and Ezekiel, with an indistinct murmur about pride and upstarts, snatched up his purchase and left the shop.

'They'm all agen me, cuss 'em,' he said bitterly. 'An' all becos I wouldn't let my lad ride roughshod over me, when he wanted to talk equal to his own father.'

CHAPTER IV.

JOB ROUND, no longer respectably attired, as in Captain Coninghame's advertised description, but dressed in tattered corduroys, and a dirty shirt of coarse calico, sat at the roadside above Highgate, and looked at London whilst he munched a hard crust. He had grown a stubbly red beard and moustache; his hands and face were tanned with dirt and exposure, and his native expression of resolute obstinacy was intensified. Pincher, who lay at his feet upon the grass, intent upon the heel of a loaf which in its ancient dryness was as hard as a bone, wore also a demoralised aspect, and was no longer the respectable dog of old days, but obviously a proclaimed Ishmael amongst bull-dogs. A cat had been so misguided as to attack Pincher, and though he had left her

dead upon the field, she had scratched him in her last struggles from nose to tail, and one of his pink eyes was closed for the time being, so that he had a debased and even brutal look, such as you may see sometimes in one of the costermonger class who has been badly handled in a fight.

This change for the worse had been brought about by the hand of circumstance in so short a time as three weeks, but what with the intensified look of obstinate resolve, the meagre fare, and the bristly growth of hair about his face, Job Round looked a good eight years older than on the day on which he broke his contract with his sovereign.

'No more,' he said, when Pincher had made an end of his crust, and stood up expectantly, with one eye blinking and the other watering. 'Finished; cleaned out. You acted like a fool when you made your mind up to stick to me, Pincher. You'd better have stayed at home among the fleshpots, eh? Come along. We'll make the best of it, if

they'll let us, and the worst of it if they won't.'

With this declaration he arose laboriously, and started down hill for London, going stiffly at first, with an occasional limp when his sore feet galled him, but by-and by, as his stiffness wore away, stepping out with a bold stride. It was evening, and the sun was sloping to the wayfarer's right, and cast dazzling flecks and beams through the hedge beside which he walked, and splashed high Paul's with gold, and wrapped the great town in a drowsy haze of light, through which a lofty building shone here and there, like the tower of a city more than half submerged. Job looked at the view before him and tramped along doggedly, holding both hope and despair at mental arm's length, and refusing to embrace either.

The moral sense is a very chameleon. Job Round had always held a sense of honesty which was a little stern in its fixedness, and yet, though the loaf, the hard remnants of which he and his travelling companion had

just eaten, was stolen, he had no upbraidings of conscience. To have taken a pin's worth for luxury would have been a crime, but to lay hands on another man's property in ministration to strict necessity was neither crime nor virtue, but just the inevitable thing, and outside the range of morals altogether. He was not responsible for his present position, and the world at large must take the consequences of any act to which it drove him. He was willing enough to be at friendship with it, ready to take any work it offered him, to perform any duty which would result in bare bread enough to keep body and soul together; but if this were refused him, he was ready to take the bread without performing the duty: if not equally ready, still ready and determined. He had not formed any theories about his duties to society, or society's duty to him, but he was very resolved to live (with or without the consent of the body politic) so long as he could. In fine, the young man, having fallen upon evil times, was inclined to be dangerous to himself and others.

There was not a soul in London whom he knew, and he had no guess as to how he would live or where he would bestow himself for the morrow; but something drew him on towards the great throng he knew to be moving under the hazy cloud. It was not hope, for he put hope away from him. Perhaps it was the great gregarious instinct, which is very much a passion with mankind.

A mile or two of country road, a mile or so of habited spaces, growing denser as he walked, and then the lamps of London. The noisy and bustling street offered him no chance of a home, and he must find some corner to lie down in. He turned to the right, and came upon an arrangement of buildings which was altogether new to him—a hollow square, with handsome stone-fronted houses on each side of it. It was the year in which the Reformed Parliament first met, and Fitzroy Square was still a fashionable neighbourhood, little as anybody might be inclined to think so after this lapse of half a century. There was dancing going on at one

of the houses, and the homeless wanderer stood still for a while on the pavement and watched across the square whilst the figures went gliding to and fro, casting their shadows on the blinds, and the sound of music floated into the outer darkness.

'Enjoy yourselves!' said the wanderer. 'If I could climb over here without being seen, now, I might get a decent night's rest. There's grass inside there; better than paving-stones, any way. Pincher, I'm confoundedly hungry, and so I suppose are you. It's too early yet for a bed on the grass yonder—too many people about; we must couch in privacy, Pincher. We'll come back in an hour's time or so, old dog, and in the meantime we'll have a look at London, a city of which, up to now, Pincher, we are not justified in forming the loftiest opinions. Come along. We mustn't lose our bearings, though, for there are not many bits of grass to lie on in London, I suppose.'

Muttering thus, he set his weary limbs

once more in motion, and striking upon Charlotte Street, walked until he reached Oxford Street, where he again paused to look about him. The traffic was not the traffic of to-day, for as yet omnibuses were few and hansom cabs were not in existence; but it was varied and dense enough to be a surprise to a youngster of country breeding, and in looking at it he forgot his empty stomach and sore feet for a little while. As he gazed there came marching down the street behind him a picket of infantry, a corporal and two privates, with a drunken prisoner, who, with unseasonable loyalty, was howling 'God save the King!' The absentee-without-leave was wandering all over the pavement, and a fellow-private had a hand on each arm, but each of them looked unconscious of his presence, and stared woodenly over his own high stock, and the corporal marched in front in state, unspeakably wooden. Now Job Round, having his back turned to this little procession, was unaware of it, and he took no notice of the loyal ditty so loudly chaunted; but, as his

fortune would have it, at that minute Pincher, attracted by the sight of some bit of offal in the road, dashed forward, and in the act of snatching it so narrowly escaped being decapitated by the wheel of a passing carriage that his master's heart rose into his throat with a leap, and he shouted out his name.

'Pincher! come here, sir.'

'Halt!' said a voice at his shoulder. A hand took him by the tattered collar of his coat, and turning round with a start he saw the corporal's guard, the corporal, and the drunken loyalist, who with closed eyes and mouth wide open roared, 'Send him victorious.'

'John Smith?' said the corporal, taking an extra twist at the deserter's collar. 'Six foot one? Red hair? Accompanied by bulldog answering to the name of Pincher? You'll do. Come along.'

Job heard this out, and then, by a sudden wrench, disengaged himself and ran. At the first step he came against a stout and elderly

gentleman, and in a second they were on the ground together. The corporal dashed at his prey, and in the act emitted a yell, for Pincher went at the corporal and pinned him by the leg. Job was on his feet again, the corporal kicked as he had never kicked before, and away sailed Pincher, carrying a mouthful of woollen stuff and a mere trifle of his master's enemy. The street was suddenly alive.

'Pincher!' shouted Job, 'Pincher!' For one second the bulldog stood irresolute, in doubt whether to obey the natural master or the merely human one. Affection triumphed, and he followed the retreating voice like a canine rocket.

'Stop him!' cried the corporal following. For more than a fortnight he had known of Captain Coninghame's offered reward, and had licked his lips to think of the luck the man would have who came upon a red-haired youngster of six foot one, accompanied by a bulldog who answered to the name of Pincher; and now, here on a sudden was this blissful,

unattainable, unexpected thing put in his own way without a word of warning, and snatched away again in a second. Spurred by these thoughts and by his rage at the wound he had received, the corporal ran shouting after the deserter, fearing neither him nor Pincher. The chase had crossed the street and led wildly westward, until Job, sighting a narrower and a darker road, plunged down it and found himself free to run his hardest. The corporal followed, tugging at his stock, and still crying 'Stop him!' but in the quiet limits of Soho there were few to hear him. Job doubled at a second corner, and as he did so his foot tripped, and some shadowy person took him by the arm.

'In there!' said a foreign-sounding voice. 'That door! Quick! You are safe there. *Parole d'honneur*!'

The hand guided him and pushed him, and three seconds before the panting corporal turned the corner, Job, Pincher, and the shadowy stranger were in the shelter of a

darkened doorway. The stranger closed the door gently, and they were altogether in the dark when the pursuer panted by. They listened, and heard his racing feet come to a standstill—they even heard him cursing solemnly and softly to himself; and then, when the tagrag and bobtail which had followed the hunt streamed noisily round the corner, the unseen stranger opened an inner door, and in a whisper bade Job enter. The youngster obeyed, not knowing what might happen next, but prepared to meet almost anything.

The rescuer knelt upon the boarded floor and blew at the few coals which lay gleaming dimly in the grate, and in a little while had fire enough to ignite a strip of paper, with which in turn he lit a candle. This he held aloft surveying Job, whilst Job returned his gaze with interest. What the stranger saw we know pretty well already. What the surprised visitor saw was a powerful-looking man, a little beyond the prime of life, with a figure taller and broader than his own, piercing dark eyes,

jet black hair and eyebrows, a nose jutting from his face like a crag, and an expression of insolence and dare-devilry beyond anything he had hitherto conceived. The man was dressed in a well-fitting surtout of dark cloth, his linen was clean and well-appointed, and the perfect candour of insolence with which he looked at Job impressed the lad with a sense of command.

When he had looked his fill he set the candle on a table in the centre of the room, and shrugged his shoulders.

'I have made no very charming discovery this time,' he said in French.

'Croyez-vous?' said Job. There was a large colony of French artificers in glass in Castle Barfield, and the lad had picked up amongst them enough French to get on with.

'You speak French?' said the other, with a smile. 'Have you lived in France? You are English to look at.'

'I am English,' said Job. 'I have never been in France, but I speak French pretty well.'

'Not so well,' answered the stranger, smiling again, and speaking this time in English, 'that I would not as soon hear your English. What was the matter just now?' Job did not answer for a moment. 'Who were you running away from?'

'I don't know who you are,' said Job, 'and I don't feel inclined to take a stranger into confidence at any time.'

'You took me into confidence effectually,' said the stranger with his foreign-sounding voice, 'when you came in here. Do you know why you came in here?' He leaned forward with a pair of massive hairy hands on the table, and his insolent black eyes were half closed with a smile. 'You came because I told you to come.'

'That sounds very like the truth,' said Job, dryly.

'When I speak,' continued the other, smiling, with half-closed eyes, 'men obey me. Oblige me by sitting down.' A little to his own surprise, for he had formed an unfavour-

able opinion of this singular personage, and had meant to leave him at once, Job sat down. 'You see?' said the stranger, still smiling at him. 'Now tell me, if you please, from whom you were running away.'

'Why should I tell you?' asked Job, looking half angrily and half contemptuously back at him.

'Because,' said the other, 'you cannot help it. Because I command you to tell me, and when I command men obey.'

Perhaps insufficient rations and much fatigue were answerable for it; but at this moment, to Job Round's eyes, the face of the stranger began to radiate curiously in the candle-light, and his eyes alternately to darken and to dazzle. His voice sounded far away and as if heard in a dream, and Job found himself asking drowsily, Why not tell the man?—what harm could it do? Just then Pincher made a movement, and his master, looking at him, found these curious sensations vanish. A flush of anger and contempt succeeded them.

'You can find some other man to play the fool with, if you like,' he said; 'I am going.'

'Is this English gratitude?' asked the stranger. 'Will you say, "thank you" before you go?'

'I am much obliged to you, I am sure,' said Job, in a tone which expressed no very urgent sense of obligation.

'That is better,' returned the stranger. 'Au plaisir, my friend.'

Job moved to the door and found it locked. He faced round upon the foreigner quietly:

'Kindly oblige me by opening the door.'

The stranger threw his hands abroad, and shrugged his shoulders with a thoroughly French gesture, but made no verbal answer to this request.

'Oblige me,' said Job, 'by opening this door.'

'I am not so inhospitable as to permit you yet to go,' said the other, with a tinge of mockery in his voice. 'I like you, my young friend,' he said a second later, whilst Job

glowered at him from the other side of the table.

'I don't like you,' said Job; 'and I wish to go. If you don't open the door I shall kick it down.'

'I like you,' returned the stranger, inflating his chest and throwing back his shoulders in insolent patronage. 'You are better than your clothes, and I think you might suit me if I trusted you with employment. Sit down. Listen to reason. Listen to me.'

Job had never seen the like of this personage before, and scarcely knew what to make of him. But if he had any sort of employment to offer, the world was not so friendly that Job could afford to despise him without hearing him.

'If you have anything to say,' he answered gruffly, 'I am willing enough to listen.'

'That is well,' said the stranger, with the air of one who has achieved a triumph. 'Be seated. The hour has arrived at which I usually partake of my last humble meal for the

day. Forgive me if, whilst I talk, I eat and drink.'

He bore the candle to a cupboard beside the fireplace, and, after a little rummaging there, produced a long white sausage, a loaf, and a bottle. Having set these upon the table, he drew a desperate-looking folding-dagger from his breast-pocket, and opening the blade with a click and a braggadocia unnecessary flourish, he squared his shoulders at the provisions, and fell to. Pincher arose and manifested an uneasy interest in the stranger's proceedings, looking from Job to him and from him to Job, with an occasional wag of the cropped hind-quarters, and a wistful look in the one open eye. Pincher's master, though he surveyed the food with no less desire, contrived to look indifferent—a considerable victory in its way.

The man took a pull at the bottle, and set it again upon the table without recorking it. The perfume of an admirable claret filled the apartment. He sliced a great crust from the

loaf, and threw it to Pincher, who made such short work of it that he was looking up for more before a second slice was taken.

'Where the dog is hungry,' said the stranger, 'the man is hungry, if the man is a good man.' The terrible blade carved its way through the loaf, and then severed the sausage at a blow. Next the stranger arose, and having rummaged anew in the cupboard, returned with a battered old table-knife, which he threw across to Job, pushing the moiety of the loaf and the sausage after it. 'Eat,' he said, 'and put a soul inside you. Then we will talk. There is no need to spare. There is plenty.'

Job needed no second invitation, but fell to work at once, feeding himself and Pincher alternately.

'Young man,' said the host, after a pause which was fairly filled on Job's part, 'it is well that you should know in whose presence you sit. I am—do not rise—Hercule Asmodée Bonaventure. You are naturally surprised to encounter me in a place like this; but I live

where I please and as I please. A man like myself is superior to the little proprieties, decorums, etiquettes, which govern common people. In short, I despise "les convenances." That is inevitable in a man so constituted. I despise most things and most people—naturally.' Job did not allow his contempt for this discourse to interfere with the business of the moment, but pegged away at the sausage and the bread with assiduity. 'Why did I take you by the arm—you a stranger—and guide you into safety? Why now do I feed you and sit down upon equal terms with you? I will tell you. I have said to Law and Authority, "You shall perish!" I have said to Monarchies, Republics, Administrations of what sort soever, "You have to fight Hercule Asmodée Bonaventure." The emissaries, an emissary—what do I know? what do I care whether it were one or many? —the emissaries of those hounds of Hell who imagine themselves to rule in this corner of the world pursued you. Now, playfully to pluck a hair from the tail of this ridiculous British

Lion of yours, and to scoff because I am gone before the clumsy brute can turn round to catch me, is my sport in a cheerful humour. To take him, nose and jaw, and pull him to pieces is one day my appointed mission.'

He leaned back smiling, and Job, laying down the battered knife, swept up the crumbs that remained from his repast and held them out for Pincher, looking at his host meanwhile with enigmatical aspect.

'I read your thoughts, young man,' said Hercule Asmodée Bonaventure. 'You congratulate yourself on your good fortune. You felicitate yourself upon encountering me.'

'I do,' returned the young man, with great dryness. 'The sausage was capital.'

'You think of *me*!' said the other, smiling still, 'not of the sausage. Tell me what you think of me.'

'I'd rather not,' answered Job. 'You've done me a good turn; I don't want to be uncivil.'

M. Bonaventure was not in the least dis-

concerted by this artless speech. On the contrary, he laughed at it with great and evident heartiness.

'I like you, my young friend,' he said, closing the formidable dagger and returning it to his breast-pocket. 'Tell me of what you were thinking.'

'Very well,' said Job, 'I was thinking that you didn't *look* such a fool——'

'As I am?'—with no discomfiture, but with eyes alight with laughter.

'As you seem to be,' said Job. 'You asked for it.'

'And you gave it. Well. I give you credit for your penetration. I like you, my young friend, more and more. You have candour, you have courage, you have discernment. But you do not know, my young friend, what fools there are in the world. You do not know how all that absurd big talk would astonish, would bewilder, would impress with ninety-nine young men in a hundred from a man who looks like me.'

'What's the good,' asked Job, 'of astonishing and bewildering and impressing ninety-nine fools, only to look like a fool yourself to the hundredth man you meet?'

'You are an astute young man,' said M. Bonaventure; 'but permit me to tell you that to win ninety-nine games in a hundred is to play on a sound system.'

Job sat in silence, and regarded this odd companion of his with a curious interest. M. Bonaventure took a bit of paper and a trifle of tobacco in his great hairy fingers, and rolled a cigarette with a ladylike delicacy and lightness of touch, looking smilingly at his guest meanwhile.

'You spoke just now,' said Job, at last, 'of being able to offer me some chance of employment. I shall be glad enough to get it.'

'If I find you tractable, courageous, and discreet,' returned the other, setting his arms upon the table, and leaning forward with a theatrical air of secrecy and scrutiny, 'I can give you employment which will pay you well.

I will put what I want into two words—courage, devotion.'

'Will you tell me what you want them for?'

'Not yet,' said the black-browed Bonaventure, nodding at him. 'I have great interests at stake, and I cannot offer even the simplest employment to a man of whom I know nothing. I will see more of you. You were hungry a little while ago, and nobody goes hungry in London who has money. You shall have food and lodging for a day or two, and I will make up my mind to trust or not to trust you; and if I cannot trust you, I can give you a half-guinea for your loss of time, and you can go.'

'That's very good of you,' returned the young outcast, lowering at him from under his knitted brows. 'No doubt that's very good of you; but ——.' He paused there, and sat thinking. If this remarkable braggart meant anything at all, and he had vapoured so already that Job was by no means certain that he

did, it seemed likely to the young man's mind that he meant anything but good. The younger adventurer was ignorant enough of the world's ways, but he knew that his companion's manners and present circumstances were suspicious. 'You can tell me one thing, anyhow. It may save some foolish expectations on my side and some on yours. Is the work you mean to ask me to do, if you can trust me, work that an honest man can take without soiling his fingers?'

'Do you set much store by your honesty?' asked the other in reply, with a look of humour. 'You must not speak too much about your honesty, my young friend, or I may begin to mistrust you.'

'You can trust me or mistrust me as you please,' said Job, with perhaps more surliness of voice and aspect than the declared condition of affairs yet called for. 'I'm poor enough to be ready to do almost anything for food and lodgings until I can turn myself about and see a way to a decent living; but there are one or two things I draw the line at.'

'Naturally,' returned his host, who, for some reason of his own, was a good deal amused. 'A man of sense would probably draw the line at rags, he would probably draw the line at hunger; on a chilly or a rainy night he would draw it at a doorstep-bedstead.'

Job gave a great nod and almost lurched out of his chair. It was not that the conversation lacked interest for him, but he was almost deadbeaten with fatigue, and every now and then his brain seemed to swim with sleep. He stared up now with a wideawake look, but he had not heard his host's last speech, and somehow his mind refused to tell him what had been the subject-matter of their talk a minute before.

'You are tired,' said M. Bonaventure. 'You will not greatly care where you sleep. Follow me.' He took the candle from the table, and led the way into a little chamber opening off the first. 'You can sleep here,' he went on, pointing to a mangy mattress and bolster which lay unclothed upon the floor.

'The night is warm, but if you need a covering you can take this cloak. Good-night, my friend. You will forgive me if I take the precaution to lock you in. It is my business to read character, and I know my business pretty well; but no man's reading is infallible, and I do not care to repose too much trust even in my own.'

Job, with a tired 'Thank you,' had already thrown himself upon the mattress and had drawn the old cloak about him. He had drunk no more than a single glass of his chance host's excellent claret, but, in combination with his great fatigue and the meal he had taken, it dulled his senses like a drug. As he lay looking upward at the gleaming black eyes and the waving coal black hair of M. Bonaventure, his eyes closed and sleep fell upon him like a blow.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the baffled corporal turned to retrace his steps he became aware that his leg was bleeding somewhat freely, and being for a wonder provided with a handkerchief, he bound it tightly about the wound, and limped back into Oxford Street, where his white bandage and his following of tagrag and bobtail made him a conspicuous figure. The last command given to the picket in charge of the absentee-without-leave had been the word to halt, and when he got back to the corner at which he had left his subordinates the corporal found them still there with the drunken vocalist between them, each man staring rigidly over his stock in fine unconsciousness of the little curious crowd about him.

'Right wheel—forward—march!' cried the

corporal, and the quartette moved on, the crowd accompanying to the very gates of St. George's barracks, where an officer halted the party on its way to the guard-room.

'What's the matter here? Attention! Do you hear me? Stand at attention, sir.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' returned the corporal. 'I'm rather badly hurt, sir, and I can't stand upright. Been bit by a dog, if you please, sir.'

'Bit by a dog, confound you,' cried the officer, with ready sympathy. 'What the —— do you mean by bit by a dog, sir?'

'Bulldog, sir,' responded the corporal, 'answering to the name of Pincher, sir; property of a deserter who assaulted Captain Coninghame at Gloucester, sir.'

'Take your prisoner to the guard-room,' said the officer; and the corporal, having set his trio in motion, limped on alongside, the officer bringing up the rear. The gentleman in charge was by this time drowsy, and being pushed on to a sloping wooden settle went com-

fortably to sleep there, and the corporal was starting off in search of the hospital sergeant when the officer tapped him on the shoulder with his cane and brought him to a standstill. The corporal, though valiant in fight and fleet of foot, was feeble in narrative, and it took a long time to get all the story out of him, brief as it was.

'You would know the street again?' said the officer. 'You could find it?'

'I'm a Londoner born, sir,' replied the corporal. 'I know the district well, sir.'

'And you are certain that he must have entered one of the houses in the street? You are sure that he had no time to leave the street before you got into it?'

'Dead certain, sir.'

'Very well,' said the officer; 'go and get your leg dressed.' The corporal saluted and retired, and his superior stood musing a while in the middle of the barrack square. As he mused he put his thumb beneath his lip and pressed lightly on a long, calloused scar there, feeling it daintily between thumb and fore-

finger. The reappearance of John Smith and the bulldog answering to the name of Pincher was singularly agreeable to him. The corporal had not known him by name (for the officer had only been appointed to depôt duty a fortnight before), but he had told his story to Captain Coninghame himself. It would doubtless have served Job Round's purpose just as well to have had the tale told to any officer in London, but it seemed like a pleasant omen to Captain Coninghame that it should have come first to him. There are men who find it so pleasant and refreshing a thing to have somebody to hate, that if they could exercise an unbiassed judgment they would rather be injured than not. In a certain cold and supercilious way Captain Coninghame was a very good hater, and he never looked in the glass without having reason to remember the recruit John Smith. He would have liked to vivisect the bulldog answering to the name of Pincher, in the presence of John Smith bound hand and foot.

As a matter of course, the officer in command of the depôt gave every aid to the outraged officer, and every approach to the street indicated by the corporal was immediately guarded, and watched by vigilant eyes. Signals were preconcerted, and the local Charlies were set upon the alert. In the meantime Job, undistubed by the narrowness of his late escape, slept like a tired baby, without a dream.

It was bright day when Monsieur Bonaventure, combed and pomatum'd and perfumed, unlocked the door of the chamber in which his ragged guest still lay asleep, and awoke him by stirring him with his foot.

'Get up,' he said. 'It is beyond nine o'clock.'

Job, opening his eyes, and failing to recognise his host at the first glance, sprang to his feet, but the Frenchman took him by the shoulders and gave him a slight reassuring shake.

'I didn't know where I was for a minute,'

said Job, stretching his arms abroad with a great yawn. 'I remember now.'

'There is a basin,' said his host, pointing to a metal bowl in one corner of the room; 'there is a tap, and there is a towel. Make your toilet, and I shall have something to say to you.'

With this Bonaventure walked back into the outer chamber, and Job, having closed the door and set a broken chair against it, threw off his tattered garments, and gave himself a rejoicing wash from head to foot. After this he pulled on his soiled clothes again with an expression of concentrated disgust, and joined the Frenchman. A cloth was spread upon the table, and upon it lay a white sausage and half a loaf.

'Your breakfast,' said Bonaventure, with a wave of the hand. Job set to without further invitation, and the other tramped heavily up and down the uncarpeted floor. 'I want to ask you a question,' he said, when Job had settled fairly to his meal. 'Can you tell me

why this street is under surveillance this morning, and has been since within two hours of your arrival here?'

Job paused, with a round of sausage held to his lips on the blunt point of the battered table-knife, and looked at his companion.

'I can make a guess, perhaps,' he answered, 'but it might not be the right one.'

'I could make a guess,' said Bonaventure, with his insolent smile, 'and it might be the right one. This is a peaceful district, and His Majesty's forces do not invade it often. My young friend, if I might advise you, you would strangle that ill-looking brute of yours, the bouledogue. He affords a too-easy method of identification. I knew you from the moment when you named his ominous and threatening name last evening. You are announced in the "Hue and Cry"—you are advertised in the "Times." A sensible young man would have tied a string about the neck of the bouledogue so early as the twenty-second ultimo, would have fastened to the string a well-sized stone,

and would have dropped him down a well.'

The youngster's face went a little pale below its tan, but he pegged on solidly at the bread and sausage, and his red-brown eyebrows knitted themselves into an expression of gloomy resolve and obstinacy.

'Mille diables!' cried M. Bonaventure, 'but you are cold-blooded, my young friend. I tell you that you are in danger, and you continue your respects to your breakfast, and do not blench.'

'I shall have plenty of time to be frightened,' said Job, 'but I don't know when I shall see a breakfast again.'

The Frenchman laughed, and took to marching up and down the room again.

'Do you know,' he asked, 'that a reward is offered for your arrest?'

'I dare say there is,' said the youngster, gloomily, 'but I didn't know it.'

'You are John Smith,' said M. Bonaventure, standing over him, and laughing in his speech.

'You are six feet one inch in height; the measurement of your chest is forty-one inches, which is very creditable to a man of two-and-twenty; your eyes are grey and large, and you have red hair. Now the eyes, my young friend, the height, the hair, are all nothing, and the name is less than nothing, but the one abominable fact is that you are followed by a beast who will answer to the name of Pincher. Pinch your Pincher's windpipe, my young friend, and do it speedily.' Job said nothing, but offered a piece of sausage to the dog, who took it like a pill and awaited more. M. Bonaventure, stooping towards Job with half-closed insolent eyes, laid a hairy forefinger beside his great nose, and gave a backward nod as if to bespeak especial attention. 'I am not wealthy just now, Monsieur John Smith, and I might have cleared fifty guineas this morning. I had no clue but that,' withdrawing his forefinger from his nose, and stabbing at the dog with it; 'but that is a proclamation.'

'Fifty guineas?' said Job, quietly. 'Why didn't you earn them?'

'I will tell you,' said the giant, swelling himself magnificently all over, and extending his hands for a moment before he dropped them heavily to his sides. 'I am Hercule Bonaventure.'

Job threw both elbows on the table, and stared at the white-washed wall, with his bristly chin upon his hands. Two or three hard crumbs, remnants of last night's supper, lay below the cloth, and pricked his ragged elbows. He raised the cloth and swept these to the floor, and then resumed his thoughtful posture and went on staring at the wall for a minute or two. There was only one thing clear to his mind: he had pledged himself to the dog, and, however dangerous the companionship might be, he would not end it. There was much more than the sense of the value of his plighted word in this resolve. He had never guessed until lately how bitter and how savage an obstinacy lay in his own heart, and now that

all the forces of law and order seemed to be bent on dividing him from the one living thing which clung to him and followed him in his degradation, every fibre of him seemed to brace itself against a thought of surrender. As he stared at the whitewashed wall he saw again the High Street of Castle Barfield, and heard his father's voice storming behind him. He was aware of lifted windows and opening doors and the observing eyes of curious neighbours, and he saw Pincher scouring down the street after his own retreating figure—the one living thing that followed him and clung to him! Whatever force of affection was in him, whatever disdain and hatred of the world, whatever dead weight of obstinacy any purpose of his might anchor to, whatever remembrances of his past life he held—one and all of these were useful just then for one purpose only. His present shelter was precarious enough, and he could not be certain that his companion would not betray him, or had not betrayed him already. He was penniless, and without means

of flight or self-defence. His bristly jaw and under-lip stuck out further and further, and his thick eyebrows knitted themselves tighter and tighter as he thought.

'The young man is likely to be dangerous to anybody who lays a hand upon him,' said Monsieur Bonaventure to himself as he marched up and down the room, casting every now and then a glance at the gloomy face. 'Listen to me,' he said, after another turn or two along the chamber. 'I told you last night I have need of the service of a man who will bring courage and devotion to the task that I shall set him. I should be a fool to take an unwilling servant to the work I have in hand. I have had many detractors, and have been called by many names, but nobody ever supposed me to be a fool—until last night,' he added with a laugh. 'In a hundred societies "as wily as Bonaventure" is a proverb.' The listener made an impatient movement. 'Well, I will be plain with you. I want a man desperate of his fortunes, a man of personal strength and courage,

and a man who will obey when the time comes without question. Are you such a man?'

'I'm desperate enough,' thought Job to himself. 'What does he want with me?'

'To hesitate,' cried M. Bonaventure, with his most magnificent manner, 'is to lose my confidence. Are you such a man as I need?'

'Tell me in plain English,' said Job, 'what kind of work you want me for, and I'll give you "Yes" or "No" at once. But I'll tell you one thing, M. Bonaventure. You've given me one piece of advice I don't thank you for, and shan't take the trouble to follow. I don't part with the dog. That may as well be understood to begin with.'

'Eh bien,' returned Monsieur, with a great shrug. 'You may keep the dog, but I will keep my counsel. I will not tell you in plain English what I want you for, until the time comes, or until I know you better. You are too disposed to pick and choose, my friend, for a young man whose pick and choice is so remarkably limited. You will not be five

minutes from this door before you are in the hands of the military authorities; and when the cat-o'-nine-tails has laid bare the bone of your back you will doubtless felicitate yourself of your Pinchare.' He was so scornful for the moment that he lost the picked precision of his accent, and when he ended he shrugged his great shoulders to his ears and wrinkled his nose with ineffable disdain.

'I've no great choice,' said Job. 'That's true enough. But I won't sell myself blindfold, and I won't part with the dog.'

'You do not know the man with whom you trifle,' cried Monsieur, majestically, tapping himself upon the breast. 'I am Hercule Bonaventure.'

'Yes,' said the impassable youngster, 'you told me so before. It may be a name to conjure with in the hundred societies who know it, but I never heard it till last night. In the name of Heaven, man, can't you speak? You tell me you want a man who is desperate. Here I am, if I suit your purpose. You want

a man who's strong and not over-much afraid of things. Well, here I am again, if I suit your purpose. I give you two conditions—I won't part with the dog, and I won't sell myself blindfold. Tell me as little as you please, but tell me anyhow what kind of work you want me for. I can guess already that it isn't work for a lady—or a parson.'

Monsieur Bonaventure stood smiling at his guest, but in an evil way:

'I shall tell you what I want you for when I want you, but not before. The work I have in hand will be done thousands of miles away from England, and I shall not ask the assistance of the gendarmerie of the country when I come to do it. The men who help me will enjoy a rich reward, and will undergo great danger. If I have help at all I must have it from men who are desperate and strong and brave. Now of you I know those three things, though I have not known you for a day.'

'You will tell me no more than this?' said Job.

'Nothing,' said the other.

'For all I know, you may mean robbery and murder.' The Frenchman was still smiling, and Job disliked his look. 'By George!' cried the youngster, glaring at him, 'I believe you mean no less.'

'I offer,' said Monsieur Bonaventure, with no change of aspect, 'employment to a man who is desperate of his fortune. I offer employment which will pay him well, and may make him rich for life.'

'And I decline it,' answered Job. 'I'm not a cut-throat or a foot-pad yet.'

'You put me in the way of making fifty guineas, my young friend,' said Bonaventure; 'and if I have no other use for you, I do not see why I should not make that useful sum of money. But you have eaten my bread and my sausage, and you have tasted my wine and slept under my roof; and though the fifty guineas would be useful, I must do without them, or make them in another way. I am sorry that we could not come to terms, for you

are a man who would suit me well. A man without fear is my adoration, and I love your English phlegm, which is different from the courage of other peoples.'

Job sat silent, leaning sideways towards the dog and scratching gently at his back, whilst Pincher blinked up at him with surly affection. In a little while he arose.

'Well,' he said, 'I suppose you turn me out.' M. Bonaventure shrugged his shoulders. 'If I had known the sort of terms you were likely to offer me for the night's lodging I would have gone without it.'

'Your military friends are at either end of the street,' said Monsieur, tranquilly, 'and I observed in the course of my morning walk, and in conversation with one of them, that they have enlisted the assistance of the civil authorities. You can stay here until it is dark. You will have a better chance to elude them then. If you had seen fit to accept my offer, I could have got you away, or you might have lain here until the chase was over. It will not

last long in any case, but I cannot afford to maintain a man who will be of no service to me.' Job sat down again, and Pincher who had arisen with him resumed his place upon the floor. 'My business,' resumed the Frenchman, 'will take me out until evening. You can stay here in safety in the meantime.'

'Unless you think it worth while,' said Job, 'to earn the fifty guineas.'

'That is a foolish taunt,' said Bonaventure, 'from a man in your place to a man in mine. But I shall not earn the fifty guineas. If you are hungry, there is more sausage and more bread in the buffet there, and you are welcome to it. "Au revoir." I shall see you again at nightfall.'

He took a rusty key from a nail in the wall, and tossed a black wideawake hat carelessly upon his head. Job watched him gloomily as he took a brush from the cupboard and passed it lightly over his already spotless garments, and responded with a solemn nod to his repeated 'Au revoir' as he passed from the

room. The outer door jarred open, and the listener heard the rusty key grate in the unwilling lock. He was a prisoner, but at least he was shut in from pursuit.

The weary day gave him ample time for thought, and he sat immersed in his own memories for hours. When a month had seemed to have had space enough to crawl along, the clock of a near church would strike and tell him that a quarter of an hour had passed, and in due time the chiming of the hour would assure him that he had not fallen so deep into thought as to miss the clock's voice at any of the periods appointed for its sounding. The sun was bright upon Castle Barfield High Street, and there were two or three figures lounging about at the corners of the byways which ran away from it. He could see it almost as if with his bodily eyes, and nothing was changed there. It would have been more consonant with his own state if he could have thought of the place as swallowed by an earthquake, or uprooted by

some prodigious and unnatural agency. Not five weeks had gone by since he was heir to what in those parts was thought a handsome fortune, and as happy as the day was long. What had he done to bring him to these tattered garments? What had he done to be thus homeless and proscribed and hunted? Not one thing of which his heart could not approve.

There are many stories of wrongfully persecuted people who have found great peace and comfort in the possession of a satisfied conscience, who, knowing full well that they have deserved none of the evils that have fallen upon them, are beautifully serene and happy. But to the average human heart the consciousness that misery is undeserved is an added bitterness. To have a clean conscience, and yet to have been cursed from the house in which he was born, and so cursed by his own father; to have a clean conscience, and yet to be hunted, and threatened with the lash; to have done the manly, honourable thing from

start to finish, and to have been brought to rags and hunger by it, was infinitely worse to Job's mind than to have deserved his evil fortune and then to have to suffer it. The man who would not have submitted to leave his father's house under the conditions which had been offered to him would have deserved to be houseless. The man who would not have knocked down, at any risk, that supercilious hound of an officer who wanted to drown Pincher, would have deserved the cat-o'-nine-tails richly, and Job himself would have been well pleased with the chance to lay it on. He went over everything that had happened since the moment of his encountering Armstrong at his father's door, and at every step his heart justified him, passionately, and he sat in bitter wrath and hatred of the world.

There was one way out of his present fears, it seemed; but he did not care for the road to which Monsieur Bonaventure pointed. It horrified him to think it possible that a man should deliberately prepare a scheme and

choose associates for such work as he imagined Monsieur to have in hand. He was desperate to be sure, but not yet so desperate that he could join hands with a man who took human bloodshed in the way of business. He puzzled himself greatly over Monsieur Bonaventure, but the conclusion, again and again arrived at, never varied. That French scoundrel was in earnest in his proposal, and the scheme he had in view included robbery and murder. Obviously, however desperate Job Round's fortunes may have grown, *that* programme could find no place in his scheme of things.

As to what was to be done he had not one helpful fancy, and all he could do was to brace himself in dogged resolution to fight to his last gasp if his pursuers should lay hold of him. The long unbroken rest of last night and the two sufficient meals he had taken had done wonders for him, and in his stubborn and slow burning rage he felt fit to fight an army. He had no appetite for food, but late in the afternoon he forced himself to eat a little, in

view of a probable combat, in which, whoever came off second best, he meant to acquit himself so that the enemy should remember him.

The dusk was thick in the room in which he sat, when he heard the reluctant lock creak and shriek in answer to the compulsion of Monsieur's key. Monsieur, having with some little difficulty obtained a light, set a candle upon the table, and looking fixedly at his guest, stretched out a hand sideways, caught a chair by the top rail, drew it slowly to the table, and sat down in it. Job met his insolent and dare-devil gaze with equal fixedness, and for half a minute they sat looking at each other without a word.

'Well?' said Bonaventure at last.

'Well?' said Job in answer. For a second the air seemed to thicken in his lungs, and his throat went on a sudden harsh and dry, so that the words sounded like the croak of an unusually surly raven.

'Have you made up your mind?'

'I have made up my mind,' Job answered,

'to ask you once more for a plain answer to a plain question, and if you won't give it, I have made up my mind to go and take my chance. What do you want me for?'

Monsieur Bonaventure shook his head.

'I will tell you no more than I have told you already. I shall be sorry to lose you, for I shall not easily find a man who will serve my turn so well. I do not want a gaol-bird who will cut my throat to secure the whole of our joint profits, or run away when the pinch comes. And I have seen your courage tried. It is a pity. Your military friends are still outside. There is a public-house at each end of the street, and at each public-house three men await you.'

'I can't help that,' said Job, rising and buttoning his ragged corduroy coat across his chest with steady fingers.

'Do you know what it means to have struck an officer of the British army?' asked Monsieur Bonaventure, rising also and standing, light in hand, between his visitor and the doorway. 'It

means one, perhaps two, hundred lashes from the cat. It means two, three, four, five years of imprisonment and degrading labour.'

'I *can* help that,' the youngster answered. His face was pallid and his grey eyes were half closed below his knitted brows. Bonaventure regarded him with a look of mournful admiration.

'It is a pity,' he said. 'You had better join me.'

'No,' said Job. 'I am too certain now of what you want me for. Good-bye.'

Pincher was afoot already, and looking up at his master's face. Job lifted a finger to him. Bonaventure, candle in hand, led the way to the front door; and the desperate lad, followed by the dog, walked into the street. The Frenchman blew out the light, set the candlestick on the floor of the passage, and followed to see what might happen.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL that day it had been hot and close within doors, though there had been but little sunlight; and now the black clouds hung low about the housetops, and an occasional distant rumbling threatened storm. A wet wind set all the litter of the street dancing; bits of straw and paper were seen in the illuminated corners, floating in spiral whirls; and the miserable oil-lamps winked and shuddered. Except for Job Round and his bulldog, the street was clear when Monsieur Bonaventure stood upon his doorstep and looked out. There were two or three coffee-houses, whose lights shone with comparative brightness, and as Job passed these Bonaventure could make him out quite clearly. Big as he was, the clumsy and ill-cut garments he wore had been made for a man much burlier

of build, and they gave him a look of massiveness which scarcely belonged to him as yet by nature. At the end of the street a figure lounged into the middle of the horse-road and stood there, and Job Round lounged on towards it. Monsieur Bonaventure closed the door behind him, and, leaving the doorstep, took a score or so quick paces along the footway.

When Job, with Pincher paddling silently at his heels, had come up to the waiting figure in the middle of the road, Monsieur heard a voice which cried out—

'Halt! I take you prisoner in the king's name.'

In a flash of time the inventor of this imposing formula was sprawling on his back, and Job was round the corner.

'Bien tapé!' said Monsieur, with a laugh, to himself.

But little more than a second later a struggling heap of men came round the corner, and the on-looker made out Job Round among them.

'Saprelotte!' cried Monsieur; 'he has met the relief picket.'

Unluckily for Job, his surmise was true; and while the Frenchman stood looking on, three men in uniform dashed past him, and two others emerged from the public-house in whose light the struggling figures swayed about the street. Dire and terrible yells arose as one man emerged from the mass with the bulldog attached to him. Job fought like ten men, and his hitting was terribly hard and clean. At one time he had half the little crowd about him down; but, if his opponents could do no more, they clogged him by their numbers, and clung to him till he could move neither hand nor foot. Then he went desperately quiet, and stood breathing hard until the men who had hold of his legs released them and arose, and the rest fell back from him until only one man held him by each arm. The others, thinking him vanquished, began to tug at their tunics and belts and to pick up their scattered forage-caps; and one, drawing his bayonet—they all

carried sidearms—made a dash at Pincher, who still clung to his victim. At this Job gave one mighty wrench, which left the major part of both sleeves of his ragged coat in the hands of his captors, and with a clean right-hander, delivered with the whole force of his body behind it, sent the man with the bayonet staggering against the wall of the public-house, and started for a run. But the whole crowd were again upon him in an instant, and though he set his back against the wall and made a foot or two clear in front of him, they had him down in almost as little time as it takes to tell it, and with half a dozen sprawling and kneeling on him all at once, he was powerless. The terrible bulldog, having been compelled to let go his victim by want of breath, chose another of his master's assailants, and effectually distracted his attention from the deserter.

'You'd better come quietly,' said the sergeant in charge of the picket. 'Where's them handcuffs, Bob? Slip 'em on. Now get off him some of you. You've made as good a fight of

it, matey, as any man need wish for, and now you ought to be able to find it in your 'art to come along quite affable and cheerful.'

Job rose to his feet, with his dirty rags all fluttering about him, his hair in mad disorder, and his face bleeding. He looked around, and saw that the street was full of people; and amongst the on-lookers was Monsieur Bonaventure, cool and grave. The big Frenchman was noticeable in more ways than one, but it was enough that, like Saul, from his shoulders and upwards, he was higher than any of the people. When he caught Job's glance, he gave him a strange nod, which seemed, if it could have been translated, to have some meaning in it.

'Put a bayonet into that dog one of you,' said the sergeant.

'Pincher!' cried Job; and to his amazement the brute let his second victim go at once, and stood at bay over his body in the middle of the horse-road. One of the men who, in obedience to the sergeant's order, had already half withdrawn his bayonet, stood with one

foot forward and looked at him, but for reasons of his own went no further.

'Is there anybody here,' said Job, wiping his bleeding face with his pinioned hands and then looking about him in the crowd, 'who'd care to keep a valuable dog?'

'I should like the dog,' said Monsieur Bonaventure, 'if he would go with me.'

Job crossed the road, stooped for Pincher, raised him in his manacled hands, and laid him in the Frenchman's arms. Curiously enough, no man interfered with him.

'He knows it's all right,' he said, in a broken voice. 'Good-bye, Pincher.' He stooped and kissed the dog's head, and the crowd very naturally jeered at him. 'I'm ready, sergeant,' said the youngster. 'I've knocked some of you fellows about a bit,' he added grimly, as he looked around, 'but I couldn't help it. I had to make a fight for it.'

'No malice, chummy,' said one whose left eye was lost to sight for the time, and quite hidden by the swelling of the cheek and brow.

'Thirteen to one 's long odds, and whatever the thirteen gets off the one they ain't got much right to grumble.'

'Silence!' cried the sergeant, who was somewhat exercised in his mind as to the proper words of command by which to form his men. 'Fall in! Attention! Tell off from the right! Odd numbers three paces to the front—march! Close up to the right! Now you two, bring your man in here between the front and rear rank. Here, where's them other two fellows?' Pincher's subjects were hors de combat. 'Jones, you fall out and bring a hackney-coach. Get them men in, and drive them to the barrack hospital, straight. Dress by the left here! Eyes right! Quick march!'

The crowd opened and made way, and the soldiery, with Job Round in the middle, marched off with solid regular tramp on the firm roadway. Pincher whimpered in Bonaventure's arms, and as the little procession turned the corner leaped down and paddled after his master.

'There is as much sense of self-preservation in the one as in the other,' said the Frenchman to himself with his own insolent smile. 'They have equal courage and equal discernment. And the fool kissed the dog. Ugh! what sentiment!'

He walked slowly to his own door and admitted himself by means of the big rusty key. In the doorway he paused to look at the threatening heavens and the deserted streets.

'I will not lose him if I can help it,' he muttered; 'and yet he is lost already. It is a pity. Sac à papier! how he scattered the soldiers. He would have made a good comrade. It is a great pity.'

He looked once more upon the street and the threatening sky, and, entering, slammed the door behind him.

There had been no such cause for hilarity in the guard-room at St. George's Barracks for many and many a day as the aspect of Sergeant Johnson's picket presented when they appeared there with Job amongst them. The appearance

of the deserter himself was provocative of mirth to begin with; and his captors were so dusty, so torn and battered, that their comrades scarce knew when to have done laughing. Whilst they were enjoying themselves, the prisoner was looking about him, wondering where he would be bestowed, and asking himself what chance of escape he had. He was stiff and sore after his tussle, and bruised from head to foot, but he was no more disposed to surrender himself now than he had been at the first. Since he had clearly seen that a present escape was impossible he had ceased to fight, and he meant to be extremely cheerful and submissive now, if thereby he might widen his chances by one hair's breadth.

'You don't mean to say, Johnson,' said the sergeant of the guard, 'that your fellows has let one man knock 'em all about like this?'

'I mean to say,' returned Sergeant Johnson, slapping his prisoner on the back with great good-humour, 'as this is the best young party for a rough and tumble as I ever knew, and I

think the appearance of the picket does him credit. That's what *I* mean to say.'

'Strike me ugly!' said the sergeant of the guard. 'Hillo! Who's this here dog belong to?'

Job groaned aloud as the undiscerning Pincher walked into the house of the enemy and coiled himself up on the floor at his feet.

'If there's a man among you,' he said, looking round him, 'who has a heart in his breast, I beg him to take care of this dog, and give him or sell him to a friend who will treat him well. He's a valuable dog. There are hundreds of people who would gladly give twenty guineas for him.'

'He's mine,' said Sergeant Johnson, with alacrity. 'Prisoner o' war, *he* is.'

'There's a pel o' mine, serjint,' said one of the men, 'as is a dawg-fencier. I might fetch him up to have a look at him.'

'This way, young man,' said the sergeant of the guard, laying a hand on Job's shoulder. 'Here's your lodgings for the night.' Pushing

his prisoner forward with one hand he threw open with the other a door which hung between the outer and the inner guard-room. There, on a sloping bench some twelve feet wide by six deep, with a wooden pillow at the top of it, lay two or three men in custody, all of them drunk and asleep.

'Am I to keep these on?' asked Job, extending his hands to show the handcuffs.

'Well,' replied the sergeant, looking humorously back at him, 'you won't sleep no worse for *them*, you know. And you seem to have been that handy with your donnies as I think you'll really be the better for 'em. Next to a strait weskit,' pursued the sergeant, with a broader smile of humour, 'they're the finest out'ard application for a violent temper as is known to the faculty.'

'Ah,' said Job, 'you're a funny fellow. I wonder if you'd be half as disposed to be comic at my expense if I had 'em off and we were by ourselves.'

He reflected a minute later that it was un-

wise to make an enemy of the man, and resolved to set a guard upon his tongue. The sergeant cursed him for a sulky brute, as if he had expected to find him in high spirits, and, quitting the room, slammed the door and bolted it. The captured deserter sat upon the edge of the wooden couch and surrendered himself to his own bitter thoughts. Blameless from first to last, and to have come to this! The place he sat in was almost dark, and smelt vilely; but he cared little for the mere discomforts of the situation, though his mind wandered towards them as it wandered towards a hundred other things, in spite of his urgent effort to keep it fixed upon one theme. The thing he wanted to think about was the chance of escape, but this one subject seemed to elude his mental grasp, and he felt, with the working half of his mind, as if it were the merest absurd trifle, though a consciousness apparently outside his own was fully aware of its supreme importance, and bullied him unavailingly to think of it. He was naturally ignorant of all forms of

military law, but some unformed idea of a court-martial began to press itself upon his mind, and he wondered whether he would be sentenced to be flogged or shot. His interest even in this theme was vague, and as easily broken as a burnt cord. It snapped whilst he listened to the snoring of one of his drunken fellow-prisoners, whilst he stared at the overgrown red wick of the oil lamp which hung high in one corner of the room, whilst he counted the bars in the grating above the door, whilst he listened to any meaningless scrap of talk which reached him from the outer guard-room. For the moment, though he did not know it, he despaired, and all these foolish trifles were Despair's playthings. There is nothing more indifferent than Despair; gay Leisure itself is not more willing to blow bubbles.

By-and-by the prisoner laid himself down at the extreme edge of the wooden couch, as far as he could get from his snoring companions, and tried to dispose himself for sleep; but the wooden pillow creased and pinched his ear on

whichever side he lay, and his manacled hands were not to be arranged comfortably. He sat up again, and, leaning his back against the wall, tried to take an interest once more in his own prospects, but in a while surrendered that endeavour, and sat in a mental fog in which all sorts of blurred and distorted objects passed him by. Suddenly Captain Coninghame came into the misty circle of his thoughts, and straightway everything grew clear. He rose to his feet and went tramping up and down the narrow space between the wooden couch and the wall. It was that man (he did not know his name yet) who had wanted to drown Pincher, and that wanton and wicked cruelty had been the beginning of all his real troubles. Whenever he came to be tried, that man would have to give evidence against him. Let them leave his hands free at that time and they would scarcely think it worth while to flog him.

The bolt grated in the hasp, the door swung open, and the very man of his thoughts entered the room followed by the sergeant of the guard,

who bore a lamp which he held aloft so that its light might shine full upon the prisoner.

'Yes,' said Captain Coninghame, in a cold and supercilious voice which matched his face, 'that is the man.'

'Yes,' said the prisoner like an echo, 'that is the man.'

The sergeant was between them, and Job's hands were bound. It was not worth while to throw away revenge by trying to snatch it at that time; and so Captain Coninghame, turning on his heel, got away safely, and the sergeant following, closed the door.

Next morning, when the prisoner appeared for a minute in the barrack square on his way under escort to the orderly-room, all His Majesty's forces then in the barracks turned out to enjoy the spectacle. What with the sleepless night he had passed through, and the emotions which had been running in his breast, Job was a little dull by this time, and he did not feel any anger or contempt at the fellows who guffawed so rejoicingly at his rags. He

thought only that if another man had been in his plight he would not have laughed at him; but he had no sense of self-pity and no sense of resentment. When he was introduced to the presence of the officer in command, that functionary was naturally scandalised at his appearance, and in sending him back to the guard-room to abide his trial by court-martial gave orders that he should be clothed in the uniform of his regiment. The depôt tailor accordingly visited him and took his measure. Whilst he walked about him, tape in hand, he observed with much humanity that it would be a pity to have a brand-new pair of trousers spoiled by blood-stains, and he undertook to lend the prisoner a pair of white fatigue-trousers to be flogged in. These, he said, would wash, or could be pipeclayed over, and could therefore receive no damage. He added that it was customary to be flogged in fatigue-dress, and supposed that arrangement to have been dictated originally by frugal motives.

A mass of correspondence, of which the

prisoner naturally knew nothing, was written and docketed concerning him, and it was finally decided that the martial court should be held at the headquarters of his own regiment, and he was accordingly marched as a prisoner to Bristol, and there shipped for Dublin. This was Job's first experience of salt water, and he was horribly sea-sick, but he bore that evil (as he had borne the troubles that had gone before it) in a suppressed rage of endurance. He excited neither sympathy nor interest, but was handed from one authority to another as coolly as if he had been a bale of goods. He was generally adjudged a sulky fellow, for he spoke no word to any man, and did nothing but brood over the chances of escape and vengeance.

A mere regimental court-martial was of course inadequate to the enormity of Job's offences, and he lay for some days in the guard-room at Island Bridge whilst the officers who were to form the higher tribunal were summoned. On the third day there swaggered into the chamber in which he was confined no

less a personage than the sergeant from whom he had taken the shilling, and he and Job instantly recognised each other.

'His Majesty made a nice bargain when he gave a shilling for you, young man,' said the sergeant, severely, as he straddled his feet apart and held his cane jauntily across the back of his shoulders. 'You'd better ha' sold that bulldog of yours to me for a guinea than ha' got into this mess about him—don't you think?'

Job was silent, and one of the sergeant's companions, who had swaggered in with him, laughed at his sombre and threatening face.

'It's no use wasting words on him,' he said. 'Perhaps he'll find his tongue when the farrier gets at him.'

Job did not know much of military matters, but he made a guess as to the meaning of this allusion.

'Not as the dog wasn't a vallyble dog,' said the deserter's old acquaintance, turning on his friend. 'He was a real bit of genuine blood, and that I will say. And I don't think none

too high of Captain Coninghame when Sergeant Johnson might have made perhaps as much as five-and-twenty guineas by him, and the young man had made a free gift of him. It was a cruelty on Johnson, for there's none of us sees a chance of making five-and-twenty guineas too often, or five-and-twenty pence for that matter.'

'What did Captain Coninghame do with the dog?' asked Job, rising from his seat on the edge of the wooden bed.

'Well,' cried sergeant the second, 'that's a merracle. You've cured the dummy, old man.'

'Poisoned him,' said the old acquaintance, 'with a piece of 'am, with strychnine rolled up in it.'

Job sat down again in silence. His hands were no longer fettered. He would be taken before the court-martial with free limbs; and if only Captain Coninghame there gave his evidence as he had done in the orderly-room in London, standing on a plain floor within two yards of him, though a regiment tried to drag

him from his enemy, the dog should not go unavenged. He had made it a point of honour that the dog should live, and he had dared everything for that so far. That his heart had fastened to him, as it had, when Pincher was the one affectionate living thing left to him, served certainly to intensify his hatred of the man who had killed him; but if the dog had been altogether outside the range of his affections, it would have made little practical difference now. For not only when he had knocked the officer down, but later, in his hunger and his raggedness, and in the fact that he was hunted and had eluded the hunters, he was at war with Captain Coninghame, and his heart was set on foiling him, and leaving him hungry for revenge. If Job had won in the conflict, he could have forgotten and contemptuously forgiven; but he had lost—had lost all round—and in that fact lay the true bitterness of the situation, which would have been bitter enough in all conscience, even to a

palate less susceptible than his to the loathsome flavour of defeat.

In his mother's time the lad had received a rigid scriptural training of the old-fashioned congregational nonconformist sort, and his mind was stored with many texts of Holy Writ. Some of these came to his memory again and again, and his mother's face came with them, seeming to warn him from his purpose; but he endured these assaults of conscience as he had endured the other miseries which had gone before them, and was not to be swerved from his intent. He waited in a slow-burning deadly rage for the day which should put his enemy within reach of his hands.

He heard réveille sound on the morning of the day appointed for his trial, and a little later the call to stables. The hoarse voices of the men as they answered to the roll-call reached his ears through the fog and the dusk with a singular clearness. He heard the young-horse ride jingle off on its road to the ménage, and the tramping of the horses of the recruits

as they were led to the riding-school along the cobbled pavement in front of the stables. He had grown accustomed to all the sounds of barrack life, and could tell the time of day by them, even when he did not know their meaning.

Heavily as time had already crawled with him, he had known nothing like the slow-drawn length of this morning, and he could, but that he repressed himself, have prowled like a wild beast up and down his cage. As it was, he sat stone-still, with his heart burning within him like a muffled furnace. It is not commonly given to the British soldier to read the outward evidence of emotion, and the general opinion expressed of him that morning was that he was cowed by the approaching trial. Later on, in the light of events, everybody who had seen him knew what his mood had been, and each was very particular in calling his comrades to note that he had made a true diagnosis of the prisoner's state of mind, and had pronounced him dangerous.

'Stand up here,' said the sergeant on guard for the day, entering at last. 'Let us have a look at you. Put your cap on. More over the eyebrow. That's better. Is that how you stand at attention? Put your heels together. Set the little finger of each hand again the trouser seam, and turn the palms to the front. Come along. We shan't have the drilling of you, I reckon, for a year or two.'

He bustled his prisoner into the sunlit barrack square, and setting him in the midst of the escort which waited at the guard-room door, gave the order to march. Recruits were at the sword exercise in the square, and the drill corporal paused in the word of command, and left his detachment with their sabres at arm's length, all pointing towards the prisoner, whilst he turned round and sat upon his cane to stare at him. Men at stables crowded the stable-doors to stare at him, and almost every window in the men's quarters was thrown up by the inmates of the rooms, who craned their necks to watch him round the corner.

The room in which the court was held was a large bare apartment in the same body of building with the officers' quarters, and Job, having had his forage-cap tumbled from his head in an outer chamber, was ushered into the presence of his judges. The proceedings were wonderfully direct and simple. The recruiting sergeant swore to having enlisted the prisoner; but this was a concession to a member of the court who had a legal mind, and stickled for a formal identification. Then the grizzled old non-com. who had first found fault with Pincher told what he knew of the story, and the sergeant of the picket, in response to leading questions, told what a desperate resistance to arrest the prisoner had made.

When each witness had made his statement, the prisoner was asked if he had any questions to ask, and in each instance he merely shook his head. Now the president of the court inquired if he had any statement to make in his own defence. The prisoner responded

that he was charged with assaulting Captain Coninghame, and waited to hear what Captain Coninghame had to say. The court admitted that the prisoner had a right to demand Captain Coninghame's examination.

There was a pause of perhaps two minutes, during which the adjutant, who acted as secretary to the court, and was a bit of an amateur artist, made a sketch of the prisoner's profile on his blotting-pad. Then Captain Coninghame entered and told his story, in obedience to the questions of the president. As Job stood facing the court, a dragoon, bareheaded, but otherwise in parade dress, stood on either side of him, and the officer he was charged with assaulting sat to give his evidence at the elbow of the prisoner's right-hand guard. When he had told his story—

'Have you any questions to ask?' demanded the president.

'Yes!' said the prisoner, stretching out his right arm and setting the guard back a little. The man involuntarily retired a pace, and Job

faced his accuser. Nobody paid any heed to this at the moment, and it looked natural enough that the prisoner should wish to see the officer whilst he questioned him.

'You say,' said Job, his deep voice throbbing a little, 'that it was you who gave orders for my dog to be drowned?'

'Ye—es,' said Captain Coninghame. He had his hand at the scar upon his lip.

'You remember that I asked you, since the dog was valuable, and I was much attached to him, to permit me to keep him until I got here, in the hope that one of the officers of the regiment might accept him?'

'I remember something of the kind,' said Captain Coninghame.

'You refused that request?'

'Ye—es. I refused it.'

'The request in itself,' said the president of the court, 'does not appear to me to be unreasonable. May I ask, Captain Coninghame, why you refused it?'

'I refused it because of the prisoner's manner

of making it, which was threatening and insolent.'

'You are a liar, Captain Coninghame,' said the prisoner, with a slow seriousness which upset the gravity of two of the younger members of the court. The president checked him sternly—

'Another speech like that will close your mouth altogether.'

'Very good, sir,' said the prisoner, bowing; 'I will not offend again in that way.' Then he smiled in so bright and strange a way that those who saw it remembered and wondered afterwards that they had suspected nothing. He turned anew to Captain Coninghame: 'Since I was brought away from London, you have taken my dog from the man to whom I gave him, and have poisoned him, I believe?'

'Ye—es,' said the witness, and the prisoner was on him in a flash, the chair in which he sat was overturned, and the two were on the floor together. It was done so suddenly that the prisoner was on his knees above his enemy,

with both hands about his throat, before any other man there had made a conscious movement. Then everybody was upon him, tugging and haling together, and between them they dragged him to his feet, but the officer came with him limp in his grasp already, and it was not until one of the guard dealt Job Round a half chance blow upon the head, which for the moment stunned him, that he loosed his hold.

Captain Coninghame was set up in a chair rather more dead than alive, and the prisoner, in the excitement of the situation, was wrestled with and hammered beyond the limits of necessity. He did not lift a hand to defend himself or to retaliate, and by-and-by, being jammed in a corner and held there, was otherwise left alone, until the president of the court ordered him to be removed, and he was marched back to the guard-room, reeling a little in his gait, but smiling now and then like one well satisfied.

Now this assault in court naturally stamped the prisoner as a peculiarly desperate and

dangerous young man, and nobody thought it worth while to think that, but for a piece of tyranny and cruelty, he might have made an excellent soldier. It may be allowed that such a reflection at such a time would have been out of place, and that nothing remained but to render justice (meaning that which should be most unpleasant for the prisoner, and most deterrent of his like) in fullest measure. So the court, in its wisdom, agreed that the last assault should be accepted as a new and separate offence, for which the prisoner should be tried anew after sentence passed and punishment inflicted for his earlier crime. The verdict and sentence were recorded, and, with a précis of the evidence on which they were based, were forwarded to the authorities for confirmation, and meantime Job lay in the guard-room, handcuffed anew, and subject to the sternest discipline. He learned casually that Captain Coninghame was more severely damaged than had at first been supposed, and that the regimental surgeons, thinking his case dangerous,

had called in the aid of one of the city physicians, who apprehended an internal growth as the result of the violence which had been done him; but he learned later on that this fear had vanished, and that the captain would shortly be able to return to duty.

In barracks there was a certain admiration and friendship for the prisoner, as there always is in those rare cases where a private assaults an officer, commissioned or non-commissioned. It would be different, of course, if the superior were popular, but then it is never the popular officer who is assaulted. The friendly feeling made no difference to the callous freedom of speech in which Job's comrades indulged, and he heard his own case discussed so often, that he was made familiar with the views of the most experienced in respect of it. A flogging (which might or might not be divided into instalments, between which he would spend his time in hospital) was inevitable. Then would come a term of imprisonment, which might extend from one year to three or four. After

that, a new trial, a new flogging or series of floggings, a renewed period of imprisonment; and then his term of servitude as a soldier would begin, the time spent in prison not counting in the period for which he had enlisted. The muffled furnace fire in the lad's desperate heart burned hotter and hotter as he faced this shameful and terrible future.

A month or two before no man would have predicted such a life, or even have thought it possible for him, and no man could have foreseen the murderous rage and resolution which now filled him. Of the awful possibilities which lie hidden in any resolute nature, we are for the most part happily unconscious. The feeble cannot sin greatly, any more than they can be greatly virtuous. Their puny worst or best can make but little difference to the world, except where they have the chance power to divert the stronger from their native courses. Who cares which way a popgun points? But you want your heavy ordnance mounted *against* and not *on* the Devil's earthworks.

The action of the court-martial was confirmed, and on a raw day in early autumn Job Round was publicly flogged in the riding-school in the presence of the assembled troops. He took his punishment as he was expected to take it, without a cry or a groan, and he was sent to hospital at the close of it to make ready for the next performance. Of late years, the sentiment against the cat has set in so strongly that even the professional mind has been influenced by it, but in Job's day humanitarian ideas were the exclusive property of a few crotcheteers whom nobody greatly regarded, and the first instalment of the lash left the strong man sick for a week or two. When he first went to hospital there were three men lying in the same ward with him, but in a few days' time they began one by one to mend, and as he approached convalescence he was left alone.

The hospital sergeant was an unmitigated brute, in whom familiarity with suffering seemed to have bred an active dislike of all sufferers. The convalescent who did duty as hospital

orderly hated him like poison, and out of this fact arose a new and unexpected turn in Job's fortunes.

The orderly slipped into the ward one day with a pale and frightened face, and the prisoner-patient noted that his breathing was tight and irregular. When he had closed the door he advanced on tiptoe to Job's bedside.

'I don't want to ask you, Smith,' he said, in an agitated whisper, 'if you'd like to get out of this.'

'If you play me a trick,' said Job, with his own face paler than the other's, and his eyes ablaze, 'I'll kill you.'

'It's no trick,' said the man, in a panting whisper. 'There's a friend of yours outside. A Frenchman. He was in the canteen last night. He give me a guinea to speak to you, and promised me five if I could get you away. I told him I should have to give 'em leg bail as well.'

'Bonaventure! beyond the shadow of a

doubt,' thought Job. 'What could have brought him here?'

'Can you do it?' he asked.

'I can do it,' said the other, 'if you're game to try. But I was to get your promise for the Frenchman. He said you'd understand, and he said he'd trust your word. I shall see him again to-night. What am I to say? I mustn't stop here any longer now.'

'You can do it?'

'I can do it, and I would if it was only to spite that scoundrel of a sergeant. They'll break him if we get away. That's one comfort. What am I to say?'

'Give him my promise,' said Job, and the man, with a nod, was gone. 'I'd join Apollyon to get out of this,' said the prisoner, sitting up on the bed and looking about him with burning eyes.

And so the final cast of that main was thrown, and Monsieur Bonaventure was the winner.

BOOK II.

HOW JOB ROUND BEGAN HIS REPENTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

'GREEN fields,' said a dreamy voice—

> 'Green fields and falling waters, and, afar,
> —Faint as that echo of his watery war
> Old ocean leaves within the twisted shell—
> The peaceful chiming of the convent bell.'

'Clem!' said another voice, quick and clear and eager, 'that is beautiful. It's like Keats himself. You are a poet, Clem—a real poet.'

'Ah!' said the dreamy voice, 'it would be easy to go mad with vanity and think so.'

On a blossoming bank, beside and below a Jacob's ladder, lay a man of uncommonly large proportions, smoking a pipe, and staring up at the blue of the summer sky through the tracery of a dog-rose bush and the trailing woodbine

which grew above it. When he had first heard these voices he had lifted his head to listen, and had dropped back again with a recognising smile. He was a man with a huge beard of chestnut red, and a moustache to match; he had a great bony nose, big grey eyes, and shaggy red-brown eyebrows, and as he lay there he looked a tranquil defiance at the very sky above him. The dominant expression of the man was calm defiance. He was loosely dressed in well-made tweeds of light texture but darkish colour, and the thin fabric, falling in natural folds about his limbs, showed the lines of thighs and arms which might have served a sculptor with a tolerably worthy model for a Hercules. His hands and face and neck were lean and brown, and, massive as he was, it was evident that there was scarcely an ounce of waste material about him. His white wideawake hat had fallen off, and his head lay nestled in it; one great leg was flung lazily across the other, and his whole attitude was one of peace and ease. Yet the merest look at

his face sent the pleasant country lane and the idle, restful attitude clean out of mind, and left you with the sense of a masterful challenge, so unconscious of itself, and so much a part of the man's nature obviously, that it impressed profoundly, but could not irritate as any conscious defiance would have done.

A Jacob's ladder, in the Castle Barfield idiom, is any flight of steps which runs from a raised field into a lane below it. The name may be known in other districts, rural or once rural, but I have not met it elsewhere. The Jacob's ladder outside Castle Barfield was a common tryst for lovers in the summer time, and that lover would have been hard to please who would have wished a prettier trysting place. For the dog-rose bloomed there white and pink in its season, following on the white and pink of the earlier may; and the great white crowns of elder blossoms were thick in the beautiful overgrown hedges; and harebell and foxglove and fern, and all wayside plants and flowers known to the region, flourished on

the banks in their own time and order, and made the lane a very garden, delicious to heart and eye. And wherever the hedges broke there were miles and miles of gently rolling dimpled hills and vales, a pastoral country rich with wheat and barley, and sweet grass for the browsing cattle, and glorious with great elms, like a park. The high-lying fields above the Jacob's ladder commanded this view unbrokenly, and the two young people whose voices had disturbed the idler were placidly aware of the lovely scene, and were both in tune with it. They were man and maid, and the maid, whenever she looked at the man, regarded him with an air of affectionate protection. He was a mere dwarf of a fellow, with a writhen and stunted figure, and she was a young Juno, with just a touch of rusticity and no more. The girl was quite a grand creature to look at, with her noble stature and heroic figure, and the man was piteous by contrast. He was young, but he was yellow and wrinkled, and his brown eyes, which showed preternaturally large and

bright, held a look of uncomplaining suffering. She was full of health and strength, and moved —conscious of the glory of the day and the solitude of the fields—with a hint of a dance in her gait, whilst her companion shuffled and crawled at her side. She was dressed in a soft white muslin with pink sprigs sprinkled all over it, and the fashion of the dress was the fashion of the year 1858.

When she had stepped over the stile and had reached the first round of the ladder, she turned and gave her companion so serviceable a helping hand that she might almost be said to have lifted him to her side.

'Hillo there!' said the recumbent giant, as the two came down the steps together hand in hand. The girl leaped into the lane, and, taking him by both idle hands, pulled at him laughingly until he stood up and stooped to kiss her.

'Clem!' she cried, 'look at father! Did you ever know such a lazy fellow?'

The writhen dwarf was in the lane by this

'That's as much as can be expected to begin with, perhaps,' said the other. 'We'll guarantee a circulation of two, eh, Sarah? And you can do without the filthy lucre, Clem. Your bread's buttered for you beforehand, and you can cultivate literature on something more palatable than a little oatmeal.'

'Yes,' said Clem, 'I am a very close-shorn mutton, but the wind is tempered.'

They both looked at him quickly, but he answered their glances with a smile. It was so unheard-of a thing that he should complain, that his companions were startled to hear him recognise his own condition in howsoever slight a way. The little speech saddened both father and daughter for a moment; but the hunchback went his way smiling and dreaming, and it was evident that he had no sense of sorrow on his mind.

'I can't say,' broke in the big man's voice on the silence of the lane, 'that I have any great fancy for the run of modern verses. I can't understand Browning, and Tennyson is a

great deal too sugary for my fancy. Scott tells a plain tale like a man; and Byron is the most enchanting grumbler in the world, and, besides that, he has fun in him. But, leaving those two, I have to get back to Milton before I find anybody I can greatly care for.'

'You're a Tory, Job,' said the hunchback, laughing.

'I'm too old a bird to learn new songs, and that's a fact,' said the big man, laughing also, 'but I'm ready to punch the head of any critic who says you're not worth three of Tennyson and twenty-four of Browning. They're worth nothing between 'em.'

'And three times nought is nought,' said the girl, 'and twenty-four times nought is nought. What a courtier to live in a poet's palace! isn't he, Clem?'

'Oh!' said Clem, with a comic upward look, 'he means well.'

They all three laughed together in a way which indicated a common understanding and affection.

the other, turning at the sound of each voice, and when her father met her glance he smiled.

'What are you looking so very, very resolute about, you droll old dear?' she asked.

'Was I looking so very, very resolute?' said he, with a humorous elevation of the thick red-brown eyebrows. 'Perhaps I was resolving not to be entertained by Mr. Bowling.'

'But you *were* looking resolute,' cried the girl, 'and you smiled at me as much as to say, "I could walk through a stone wall if I wanted to."'

'Was that what I looked like?' said her father, comically. 'What a desperate old buccaneer I am, to be sure!'

'But it's true, Clem, isn't it? Isn't it true sometimes, Clem? Doesn't father look sometimes as if he would walk quietly up to an express railway engine, with his mind made up that he could go clean through it?'

'You really do look a little like that at times, Job,' said Clem, looking seriously up at his big companion.

'Desperate?' asked Job, pulling calmly at his pipe.

'No,' said Clem, 'not desperate, but wilful.'

'I was always wilful,' said Job. 'I come of a wilful stock, and I have one wilful descendant.' His daughter pinched his ear at this, and once more they all three laughed together, in a way which indicated a common understanding and affection. 'Well, here we are; and hey for cream and strawberries!' He pushed open a green-painted latticed gate, and the three entered on a wide gravelled pathway lined on either side by a close-cropped privet hedge. This pathway led to a well-kept bowling-green, with a bordering of flower-beds, and behind the flower-beds, and approached by trimly kept gravel paths edged with box, were summer-houses of green lattice-work, overgrown by ivy and Virginia creeper.

Quite an amazing young buck, with a stand-up collar, and a tall hat very much on one side, came forth from an ivy-clad house to welcome them.

'Pleased to see you, Mr. Round,' said this young man, bowing as if his spring had been touched, and still vibrating a little on his toes when the bow was over. 'Pleased to see you also, Mr. Bache. And Miss Round is always welcome wheresoever she goes.'

'Let us have some strawberries, Aaron,' said the giant, stooping to enter one of the arbours, and holding back a leafy branch so that his daughter and her companion might follow. Clem entered, but the girl was shaking hands with the young man in the stand-up collar and the tall hat. Her father, stooping to look through the doorway, saw that her eyes were bent on the turf of the bowling-green, and that her cheek was flushed a little. He dropped the branch and sat down in a corner of the arbour, with one foot on the seat. 'You've been down here pretty often this season,' he said, in a casual tone, 'haven't you, Clem?' Clem nodded. 'You and Sarah, I mean,' said the other, with what looked like a stifled yawn.

Clem nodded again, and Job Round looked at his daughter through the leaf-latticed doorway. His grey eyes were half closed, and his countenance was untroubled, and when his glance strayed to the young man in the high collar it underwent no change. A minute or two later, when the young man bustled into the arbour with a tray of strawberries and cream and powdered white sugar, he met that tranquil glance of half-sleepy observation, and was not in the least disturbed by it.

'I didn't like to keep you waiting, Mr. Round,' said the young man, 'and so you see I serve you with my own hands.'

'Don't brag about it,' said Mr. Round, sardonically. 'I have allowed men to wait on me with whom you wouldn't associate.'

His daughter read the tone rather than the words, and looked at him with a glance of deprecation, but the young man, who read neither words nor tone, laughed and ducked in answer as if he had received a compliment, and served out plates and spoons with businesslike

dexterity. This done, he lingered as if in expectation of a request to remain, but Clem was a thousand miles away from him in fancy, the girl was too shy to ask him, and nothing was farther from Job's intention.

'Clem, lad,' said Job, with truly masculine wisdom, 'that young Whittaker gets into my throat and sticks there, like a fish-bone. I think, of all the despisable young men I know, that he is king and captain.'

'*I* don't think so,' said the girl, flushing and flashing. 'I think him very agreeable and very manly.'

'Pa, pa, pa, pa!' said her father. 'What does a girl know about young men?'

Now, perhaps a girl knows as much about young men as a young man knows about girls, and perhaps neither of them is very learned concerning the other. Job Round was known in Castle Barfield as a great traveller, and a great traveller was supposed, in those parts, to be a man who had learned the world in more senses than one; but no man can find time to

study everything, and Job had never devoted even a fraction of his spare hours to the study of feminine human nature.

'What's the matter with the lad, Job?' said Clem, lifting his mild brown eyes in some astonishment.

'Matter with him?' returned Job. 'What isn't the matter with him? I can't conceive of any rightly constituted mind harbouring anything but contempt for him.'

When a father thinks that a young man holds his daughter's hand a thought too long, or fancies that his daughter lowers her eyes at the young man's presence, and when he has strong reasons for thinking poorly of the young man, what ought he to do? This is a problem which has puzzled many fathers, and comparatively few amongst them have found a solution altogether comforting. Job had not a shadow of a doubt. He was a man who scorned to puzzle himself about anything. There was but one way in the world for him, and that was his own.

Sarah cared less for strawberries and cream that afternoon than a healthy girl was likely to care after a leisurely four-mile walk on a summer day. The young man in the tall collars made an attempt to approach her, and Job, with great brusquerie of manner, shouted for him to draw near, and paid him as if he had been a waiter. Mr. Whittaker longed to be insolent—for he saw now how the land lay—but it was not easy for a young man of his calibre to be insolent with Job Round, and of the two inward prompters—the fiery and the mild — he preferred to follow the more prudent.

Job tucked his daughter under his arm, and marched her from the gardens with no abatement of his outward tranquillity. Clem followed with a confused sense of discomfort, but with no understanding of the situation. The girl, with an indignant and yet tender swelling at the heart, thought Mr. Whittaker an amiable, manly, and ill-used personage, and was disposed, in a general way, to be re-

bellious against the paternal authority and judgment.

On the way back the talk was all disjointed, and the idyllic sentiment of the early afternoon had vanished, as such delicate and pleasant things have a knack of vanishing. The poet parted from his companions at the corner of the lane which led to his father's farm, and went home alone, with a sense of lonely sadness for which his bodily fatigue was partly answerable.

'I am going to tea at Grandfather Armstrong's,' said the girl, when she and her father came in sight of Castle Barfield High Street.

'Very well, my dear,' said Job, placidly. 'Shall I call for you in the dusk?'

'If you like, dear,' returned his daughter, melting a little. Surely no daughter ever had a better father.

'Very well, then, sweetheart,' said Job. 'I'll be there at nine o'clock.'

With this understanding they went their several ways. Job's figure would have been

noticeable elsewhere, but the Castle Barfield folk were used to him, and were, moreover, the sort of people who find anything wonderful and strange for half an hour, and straightway cease to wonder. He had found for the parish a bit of romance once upon a time, but that was long ago, almost time out of mind to modern fancies. People uninterestedly remembered that his father had turned him away from home because he had wanted to marry old Armstrong's daughter. In four years' time he had come back again and had married old Armstrong's daughter against old Armstrong's will, and had made a runaway match of it. Then he had once more returned, and had built unto himself a house, and had dwelt therein, and had never done a hand's turn at work, being described as a gentleman in the list of voters for the county, and having made in some far-away place, known vaguely as foreign parts, enough money to live on comfortably. Sometimes he talked of Buenos Ayres and Asuncion, Chili and Valparaiso, and

once or twice he had spoken of a brief sojourn in the Balkan Peninsula, but these were names, and nothing more, to Castle Barfield. His four years' absence was a mystery; the origin of his fortune was a mystery; he was a bit of a mystery himself; but the people were used to him, and had long ago ceased to puzzle their heads about him. He had been a good husband whilst his wife lived, and now he was a good father. His wife had a noble monument of white marble, which must have cost a pretty handful of money, and he had never been a day in debt to any man.

He walked tranquilly along the familiar street, and, reaching his own wicket-gate, pushed it open and entered the garden. In the porch of the cottage was a lounging chair, and he dropped into this with an air of idleness at perfect leisure, and filled and smoked his pipe, caressing his beard the while. When he had finished the pipe, he knocked out the dead ashes by tapping it upon his heel, and filled and lit it anew. His face was a study for its

impassivity, until, with the last whiff of the second pipe, he rose to his feet and smiled.

'So honest Tom Bowling has turned up again, has he?' he said to himself, with an enjoying chuckle. 'And he's vapouring about his buried treasure still! I wonder if he'd give tongue quite as noisily if he guessed that I was near enough to hear him. On second thoughts, I don't wonder. I know he wouldn't.'

CHAPTER II.

THE Ring of Bells (by Abednego Parker, licensed to sell tea, coffee, snuff, and tobacco, and to brew ale, beer, and cider to be drunk on the premises) was once on a time the very heart and centre of Castle Barfield. It faced the parish pound, and the parish stocks mouldered and rusted harmlessly before its very door. The parish beadle lived hard by, and would drop in of an evening for a social glass—a genial man who could unbend in spite of his red-plush waistcoat. Next door but one to the beadle's residence was the parish church, a grey old barn of a place, with a squab Norman tower and a roof of red tiles and green houseleek. A score of families (generation after generation the same names followed one another) slept in the green graveyard, and the sheep cropped the grass

above them, and bleated a requiem scarcely more sleepy than their lives had been.

The parish pound stood at the junction of two roads, and the Ring of Bells, being just behind it, commanded three outlooks; that to the front embracing the stocks, the pound itself, and the parish church; that to the right the park of the local nobleman; and that to the left a long stretch of rolling pastoral country with a town in the peaceful distance. On summer evenings the frequenters of the house sat on benches out of doors until it began to grow dark, and there were sometimes two or three sitting on the disused and battered old stocks, each with his pipe in his mouth and his delft mug in his hand. A 'Well I niver! Beest thee i' the stocks again?' was a jest which rarely failed to raise its laugh when any new comer chose to offer it, though the joke was cracked—to use the average gently—a hundred times a year.

The big square tiles, locally called 'quarries,' with which the parlour was floored, were as red

as ripe cherries with constant scrubbing, and a pink prodigal kept sky-blue pigs in a picture above the mantel-shelf. In the sanded kitchen a generous fire burned in all weathers, and on winter nights the glazed red calico curtains gave such a promise of warmth within as few wayfarers with the price of a pint about them had the heart to fight against. But it was summer weather, and perhaps the generous fire within had something to do with the general preference for open air.

The Ring of Bells was only the rallying-place of a village now, for Castle Barfield had grown clean away from it. Fifty years earlier, the heath on which the town came afterwards to be built was broken only by the great coaching road between Liverpool and London, and the oldsters still spoke of 'takin' a walk down to the Yeth,' when they wished to indicate a visit to the town.

Job Round and his daughter had passed the house on their way homeward, and then only a solitary carter had stood, mug in hand,

at the door, whilst his horse meditated above the trough with the water dripping diamonds from his muzzle. Two or three hours later the customary guests were in their customary places. A mile away, the loungers at any house of entertainment of the rank of the Ring of Bells would have been clothed in prodigiously heavy flannels and brimless, basin-shaped caps. Here everybody was in corduroys, as to the lower man, and the elders wore small-clothes with ribbed stockings of grey worsted. Smock-frocks were the rule, and the men in small clothes wore also, for the most part, rusty silk hats with flaccid brims. Castle Barfield was Black Country, but the Ring of Bells, though only a mile away, was rural, and its frequenters were all agricultural. It might happen—it did happen pretty often—that the men of the heavy flannels were at work in the grimy, unsunned depths of the earth, hundreds of feet below the very field where the men of the smock-frocks were at work on the golden, sunlit surface.

The beadle and a small tradesman had one bench to themselves, and were the aristocrats of the assembly. The rest, with one exception, were yokels fresh from the hayfield. The exception was fresh from the hayfield too, but it was a little surprising to find him attired like the rest, and to hear him talking their talk of crops and weather and the weight of hay to the acre. One of his companions, attired in the uniform of a guardsman, would have looked no more like a man in masquerade than he did in his smock-frock and battered billycock. He was burnt to a coffee-brown by foreign suns; his billycock hat was set at the back of his head in rollicking nautical style; he wore a thin ring of gold wire in each ear; his wrists and the backs of his hands were dark blue with tattoo marks; and his beard and moustache helped out the surprising contrast his whole appearance presented to that of the men about him. His characteristic expression was one of cheerful impudence and daredevilry; but a great scar,

beginning at the roots of the hair on the right-hand side of the forehead, narrowly missing the eye, traversing the bridge of the nose, and losing itself in the moustache above the left-hand corner of the mouth, had given him a singularly sinister and dangerous look. When he walked he had a nautical roll, distinct from the clod-hopping gait, and a man with half an eye could have sworn to him for a sailor.

'Your name, I am given to understand,' said the beadle, 'is Bowlin'?'

'Right you are, shipmet,' returned the man with the scar. 'So chrissened in the port o' Plymouth in the year eighteen hunderd.'

'Which meks you fifty-eight this present 'ear?' said the beadle.

'Right you are again, shipmet.'

'You'm a talkin',' said the tradesman, who was old and shrivelled, and had a piping voice, 'to the biddle of this parish. I've allays heerd as the biddle of a parish was a mon to be civil spoke to.'

'Right *you* are, gran'ther,' said Mr. Bowling. 'But I've seen the biddle of a parish br'iled before to-day, in savage parts, and shall again, maybe. Wherefore let every man treat his neighbour friendly and respectful, but expect no further.'

'Well,' said the parish official, who was a degenerate fellow for a beadle, and had no care to stickle for his dignity, 'if you *have* sin a biddle toasted, that's so much the wuss for him, but no partic'lar charge o' mine. I was goin' to say as the talk here is as you've sin a goodish piece o' foreign parts.'

'Bless your heart,' returned Mr. Bowling, 'there's no parts foreign to me, "from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand." Only there ain't any coral strands about the Indies, nayther East *nor* West, but what's that matter?'

'When you sayin' as theer's no parts foreign to you,' pursued the beadle, 'you meanin' as you've sin 'em all?'

'All!' said Mr. Bowling.

'Well, then, if a mon can mek so bold, how comes it as you've picked up milkin' and mowin' and ploughin'? Reapin' I can't yet undertek to speak on, seein' as harvest time hasn't gone o'er we heads yet.'

'I picked 'em up,' returned the traveller, 'ah! and more to the back of 'em, afore I ever see blue water. As the song says, "I was brought up for to reap and to mow, and to plough and to sow, and to be a farmer's baw-aw-oy, and to be a farmer's boy."'

He chanted the last line and its refrain in a growling bass, and took a swaggering pull at his mug.

'Ah!' said the beadle, thoughtfully, 'bred up to it, was you? You've sin a many strange sights, doubtliss?'

'I've seen pretty well whatever there is to see,' replied Mr. Bowling. 'I've been everywhere.'

'It's a honest byword,' said the shrivelled old tradesman, with a laugh, 'as a rollin' stone gethers no moss.'

'Maybe, gran'ther,' said Mr. Bowling, with a nod at the old satirist, 'I've gathered more moss in my time than you'd think for. What d'ye say to fifty thousand pound in gold, eh? I had a fair half o' that once—a fair half! See that finger? Theer's no nail on it. Why? Why ain't there a nail on it? The others has all got nails. Why ain't there one on that there finger? I'll tell you. There was fifty thousand pound afore me, and a fair half of it mine, mind you, and I was that greedy to run my hands in it, and to get into it up to my elbers, like as if 'twas water, I tore that nail off, and it never growed again.' He looked about him with an air of challenge. The men in the smock-frocks stared stupidly at him or at one another; the beadle seemed less amazed than might have been expected of him; and the ancient tradesman's gaptoothed gums were bared with a derisive laugh. 'Ah!' said Mr. Bowling, 'you think as I'm a liar, don't you?'

'That's the truest word as you've spoke yit, young mon,' said the ancient tradesman.

'Well,' said Mr. Bowling, unabashed, 'it bespeaks your ignorance properly. You haven't been nowhere, and you haven't seen nothin', nor done nothin' except grow mouldy, like a piece of cheese in a mouse-trap, and it comes natural to a man like you to think as anything surprisin' is a lie. If I was as ignorant as you are, I should think it was a lie myself.'

'How come *you*,' inquired the beadle, 'wi' sich a sum o' money?'

'Ah!' returned Mr. Bowling, 'that's tellings,—ain't it? It was come by honest, that sum o' money was, and half of it was mine—fair and square mine, it was.'

'Well,' said the beadle, 'with a sum o' money like that you'd be welly as rich as my lord here.' He nodded his head backwards in the direction of the park. 'How come you to drop it, having once puck it up?'

'Do you see this?' asked Mr. Bowling in answer, drawing a finger along the scar which disfigured his face. 'I come by that a-defendin' of my property, and *I* was left for dead, *I* was.

One of these days I may alight upon the man that done that.' He nodded darkly, and, having drained his mug, arose, shook himself, filled and lit his pipe with great deliberation, and, receiving no reply to his last speech, rolled off with his smock-frock gathered in a great bunch at his waist.

'Nias an' Sapyra,' said the ancient tradesman to the beadle, 'mought ha' picked up summat if they'd lived i' these daysen i' Castle Barfield.'

'Well, Reuben,' said the beadle, pulling at his churchwarden in a contemplative way, 'I baint agooin' to deny as theer is some finished deceivers i' Castle Barfield. But I'm of a mind to think as theer's a word o' truth i' that mon's statement.'

'John,' said the old man, 'I thought thee hadst more gumption.'

'Didst tek note o' the finger-nail, gaffer?' asked the beadle. 'What 'd bring a thing like that in a mon's head? Who'd ha' thought o' that if he hadn't been through wi' it?'

'In the grainin' of a door,' replied the ancient, 'theer's a variety o' coats o' paint required, an' theer's marking wi' various-sized combs, and all the touches wi' the rag an' the finger. A mon o' discernation, John, teks note o' them things. If, as a wood-grainer, I design for to desave my feller men, I must look at what 'd come in in natur', and set forth my works accordin'. I speakin' i' parables to put forrad my meanin', just as a mon shades his eyesen from the too-much light to see the better for it.'

'The words o' the wise an' their dark sayins',' said the beadle, 'is a text as I've heerd handled afore to-day; an' a sage mon may talk i' that way for the better settin' forth what he means. But as to the likeliness betwixt that finger-nail and the grainin' of a door, theer's this to be considered. How 'ud you set about t' imitate a wood as you'd niver sin? Tell me that, now, Reuben.'

'Theer's a deal i' what you sayin',' the old man allowed after many deliberate puffs at his

pipe. 'An'—come to think on it—it *is* a oddish soort o' thing for a mon to light upon in a mere lyin' speckilation. It certainly stands to the likelihood o' natur', as a mon 'ud want to wash his hands in that much golden money if he belonged to it, and had it all there anunst him bodily, an' it stands to the likelihood o' natur' as the gold 'ud lie close an' heavy.'

'Right, Reuben,' said the beadle. 'An', again, it eeat the sort o' thing as a mon 'ud think on till he abode awhile to turn it over. An' if a reflectful mon like thee can on'y begin to see it, when he's turned it o'er after hearin' on it, what 'ud bring a chump-headed chap like that t' invent it?'

'Theer's rayson in what thee sayst, ode lad,' replied the ancient; 'theer's rayson in it.'

'He's been about a bit, that chap has,' the beadle began again, after an interval of sipping and smoking. 'Them gypsy fellers as is campin' at the foot o' the Beacon come down to Farmer Bache's place (to see what they could lay their pickers an' stealers on, I mek no doubt), an',

as I am given t' understand, this Bowling held speech wi' 'em, i' their own lingo.'

'Ah!' said the elder, 'I heerd tell so. The tongue is Spanish, wheer the black Spanish breed o' fowls is brought from. The Duke fowt theer, a many 'ears ago, agen Bonyparty. But theer's moor nor one i' this parish as can talk to them chaps. Theer's Sojer Wilkins for one, and theer's 'Zekiel Round's son Job for another. But as for 'Zekiel's lad, he's a don at foreign tongues, an' he can talk to the glass-blowers as if he'd been brought up among 'em.'

'They'm mostly Frenchmen, I believe?' said the beadle.

'Mostly,' replied the ancient, 'but theer's Germanys among 'em, an' they've all got different lingos. I'm give to believe as the Germanys talks as different from the Frenchmen as the Frenchmen do from we. I needn't tell thee, Jack,—as goest to church o' business every Sunday, whether thee lik'st or not—as that's a outcome o' the Tower o' Babel. Theer's

a tale about that as I misdoubt to be a fable, but it's said as one lad was i' the belief as he was talkin' Hebrew theer, but he was chatterin' i' one o' the new tongues as was gi'en 'em for their punishment, an' the master-builder waxed that wroth at him he lent him a clout across the mazzard with a trowelful o' mortar, an' while he was splutterin' to free his tongue he invented the Welch.'

The town in the peaceful distance lay drowned in an amber haze, and now and then in the towering elms which shadowed the Ring of Bells a rook cawed sleepily. When the voices of the speakers paused any faint and far-off sound became clear, and the clamping of a woman's pattens two hundred yards away was quite noisy. The church tower was eighty yards away, but the loungers heard the grumble and mumble of the works of the old clock as it prepared to strike, and listened for the sounding of the hour. It came mellow and slow, and the tone of the last stroke lingered on the breathless air.

'Nine o'clock,' said the beadle. 'Time we was a thinkin' about bed, Reuben.'

'Yes,' said Reuben, 'it's all i' the day's work. Good night, lads. Hello, John! Who's that a-comin' round by the church? My ode eyesen bain't as good as they used to be.'

'It's young Whittaker, from the Strawberry Gardens,' returned the beadle. 'He's dressed too,' he added after a pause, during which the figure drew nearer—'dressed up to the knocker. Good night, Mr. Whittaker. How's things at home?'

'Ah, Jakes,' said Mr. Whittaker, 'how de do? There's a very decent glass of beer to be had at the Ring o' Bells, I fancy, isn't there? I'll try one. It's thirstyish weather.'

The landlord had come out to hear the clock strike, and now stood in the doorway with his hands underneath his white apron.

'Will you step in, sir?' said the landlord.

'No, no,' cried Mr. Whittaker, looking about him with a condescending air, 'I'll take it in good company.'

The landlord brought out a jug and a glass, and the young man stood there jauntily to take them from him.

'It's likely weather for the hay harvest, Mr. Whittaker,' said the landlord.

'Yes,' said the young man, sipping at his beer. 'I met a dangerous-looking sort of customer at the top of Dead Man's Lane—a grizzled fellow with a great cut across his face. Is he known about here? Who is he?'

'He's a strä anger, Mr. Whittaker,' said the elderly Reuben. 'He gives it forth as he's a ode sailor, but it appears as he was brought up to the farmin', an' Farmer Bache has gi'en him empl'yment. He's been a tellin' we——' And the old man began to tell Mr. Bowling's story.

'You're not green enough to believe that,' said Mr. Whittaker, at the close of the narrative. 'Is he, Jakes? I didn't half like the fellow's looks, I can tell you, when I met him in that lonely place between Jacob's ladder and the top of the lane.'

'He's a civil-spoke feller enough,' said

Reuben, 'an' I think theer's no harm in him, though he may be a bit of a bragger in his daily walk and conversation. I should main well like to get him along wi' somebody as could mek him prewve his words—like Mr. Round, for instance. He's one o' the few i' this parish as foreign parts is known to, though maybe it's so long since he was theer as he's forgot 'em.'

Mr. Whittaker said good night and went his way towards the town, thinking no further of ancient Reuben's tale. The night was cool and balmy after the heat of the day, and the young man strode along briskly, indulging in his own fancies. He was not a very fanciful person by nature, but there is a condition which has been known to most of us as affording the rarest of stimulants to the imagination, and Mr. Whittaker, according to his lights and his nature, was experiencing the result of that condition. As water is tinted by the soil it flows through, and as the nature of the soil may make it turbid or leave it limpid, may receive

it clear and send it on foul, or receive it foul and purify it, so is the stream of every human passion enfouled or filtered by the heart it flows through. It is probable enough that most of the real passions were dirty to begin with, but civilisation has filtered a good many into purity, and religion has made some poisonous waters wholesome. Yet, if you turn back any one of these purified streams into its unclean old channel (a thing which nature and circumstance contrive to do every day of the week and every hour of the day), you can have as vile a flow as the arboreal ape was content to drink at. Perhaps the gentleman who defined gratitude, for instance, as a lively sense of favours to come, did little more than turn that purest stream into its first channel, and see what a sewer he makes it. There are hearts which taint that very water of life which we call love, until the heart's owner and his like can bear to look at it.

According to his lights, and after the pattern of his nature, Mr. Aaron Whittaker was

in love, and as in the pairing season, under the influence of the tender passion, a brighter iris changes on the burnished dove, so the young man's outward adornments began to shine more gloriously than they were wont. The country tradesmen who tailored him had sleepless nights over the thought of young Mr. Whittaker's coats and trousers, and the young man so tyrannised over and imprisoned his corns that they martyred him in their retaliation. So early as 1858 it began to be permitted to young gentlemen to wear moustaches, and Mr. Whittaker availed himself of the recent relaxation in the rules of fashion. He was tall and erect, and had a sort of dashing manner, an elastic swagger, which was not at all disliked by the young women of Castle Barfield and its neighbourhood.

Everybody knows how curiously physical characteristics crop out in a family after lying in abeyance for many generations, and it is likely that if the complete spiritual analysis of a family were as commonly to be met with as a

family portrait gallery, everybody would discern the same fact in its relation to morals. Now, given a marriage which took place, let us say, a hundred and fifty years ago, by which a woman of rare moral quality, and descended from people like herself, was united to a specious scoundrel who descended from unprincipled people. Facial quality and moral quality do not travel together, and a grandson's grandson will crop up with the face of the saintly forgotten grandmother's grandmother and the soul of her scamp of a husband.

Aaron was a handsome lad, and if he had not been so fully aware of the fact would have been pleasanter to look at than he was. Some one of his ancestors had bequeathed him a good big head, and some other of his forbears had left him a rather tawdry lining for it. His eyes were eloquent of good qualities, which in themselves he not merely did not own, but for the most part despised. An ugly spirit, moving within a beautiful frame, will take a whole lifetime to carve his tenement to his own

likeness, and unless he work by special means —as by a peevish temper, which, perhaps, is the quickest tool of all—he has scarcely made a mark at five-and-twenty. Give him another quarter of a century, and see how the crafty fiend has chiselled the corners of the mouth and pinched the eyes, or how the filthy fiend has thickened the lips and nose! Be shy in professing to read the faces of young men, lest you read grandmamma whilst grandpapa looks out through those innocent eyes, or the rake's transmitted features lead you to mistrust that fine old gentleman, his father, here once more present in the spirit before you.

The young fellow went on with his swaggering, elastic step until he reached Job Round's cottage gate, and there he paused. The grass grew thick beneath the hedge for a hundred yards or so on either side the gate, and Aaron had chosen grass in preference to gravel as being less likely to prate of his whereabouts to Job Round's ears, but he found the cottage in darkness, and stood at the gate

awhile in indecision. Sarah sometimes walked out alone of an evening, and by pure accident encountered Mr. Whittaker. She never made an appointment with him, and was always prodigiously surprised to meet him. Mr. Whittaker had always had a sort of undefined objection to the thought of an encounter with Miss Round's father, and after that afternoon's experience he felt no easier in his mind. It was evident that the father did not like him, but then the daughter did, and it was the daughter and not the father whom he wanted to marry. It was a matter of notoriety in Castle Barfield that whatever Miss Round wanted her father gave her, and though Job himself was one of the most intractable of men, the girl could wind him round her little finger. To avoid Job, to keep in the girl's good books, and to leave her to influence her father, was obviously Aaron's only policy. He had the wit to guess that she would be no worse disposed to him because of her father's discourteous treatment of him that afternoon,

and, even if she were, there was a double reason why he should see her.

He prowled about the cottage for a quarter of an hour or so, in the hope of detecting some sign of life in it, and at length, giving up all hope for the time, he set out for the Barfield Arms. He was the only son of his widowed mother, and having a pretty fair command of money, it was a habit of his, when he visited the town, to take a bed at the hotel and to breakfast there. When he swaggered into the bar his face fell a little, for there stood Job Round, and he had a shrewd fear that Job would suspect the purpose which had brought him to Barfield. But there were half-a-dozen people to shake hands with him, and by the time that friendly ceremony was over he had recovered his self-possession.

'I heard a droll story to-night, Mrs. Warton,' said he, addressing the landlady. 'There's a little bit of a romance going on down our way, it seems.'

In places like Castle Barfield, where there

is never much news stirring, a story like that of Mr. Bowling was likely to pass from lip to lip with some rapidity, and Aaron told it with considerable spirit and humour. Job Round, with his back against the door-post and his massive arms folded across his chest, seemed scarcely to listen, until the young man felt emboldened to bring his name into his speech.

'He's a bragging sort of a fellow,' said Aaron, 'and as full of lies as an egg's full of meat. It'd be a treat if some gentleman who's really been in foreign parts, and can talk the foreign tongues, 'd meet him and take him down a peg or two. But I don't know that there's anybody in Castle Barfield who could do as much, unless it's Mr. Round.'

'Have you seen the fellow?' said Job.

'Oh yes, sir,' replied Aaron, with great suavity. 'He's a biggish chap with a very dark skin, and a mark across his face which looks as if it must have gone pretty near to finishing his lies when he got it.'

'Strange things happen in wild lands, Mr. Whittaker,' said Job, smiling, 'and the man may tell the truth, after all.'

'Oh! He may, no doubt,' cries Aaron, anxious to propitiate, and delighted to find the big man in so pleasant a mood. 'If you'd like to have a talk with him—it might be interesting to you, Mr. Round—I'd undertake to get him down to the Ring o' Bells, any evening. I don't know him, but that sort of man 'll go anywhere for a skinful of drink.'

'Thanks,' said Job, 'don't trouble. I'm going down to Bache's farm to-morrow, and I dare say I shall come across him there. Good night.'

He nodded about him, and was gone, smiling still.

'I'd like to be theer,' said one of the bar loungers, 'if so be as Mr. Round should meet him. See how he laffed when he went out? I'll bet as theer's a good tek-down awaitin' that feller, Mr. Whittaker.'

'Thomas,' said Job to himself, as he crossed the street, still smiling, 'you are as indiscreet as ever. And how I shall surprise you, to be sure.'

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Bowling, all on a July morning early, armed himself with a billhook, and, drawing on a pair of hedger's gloves, went forth, in obedience to instructions, to trim the hedge which parted his employer's garden from the roadway. There had been a passing thunder-storm in the night, and the whole country side, as it presented itself to Mr. Bowling's gaze, looked as if it had been clean washed and dressed in its gala clothes for a general holiday. The scent of the fields and the fresh earth was singularly mild and sweet, and he took in the pleasant morning air in great gulps as if he were greedy of it. With a leisurely manner he swung himself up into the end of the thick-grown hedge, and began to chop there at the too-luxurious branches, pausing every now and then

to look about him as if he owned the landscape, and, on the whole, was inclined to be pleased with it.

He had been at work in this easy-going fashion for, perhaps, half-an-hour, when he drew off his gloves, and, taking a short black clay from the band of his rusty hat, he struck a lucifer match upon his corduroy trousers, and gave a rejoicing suck or two, with the flame of the match at the bowl of the pipe. Then he took another look about him, and reached out a hand for one of the discarded gloves. Drawing this slowly on, he moved round to enlarge his view of the landscape, and on a sudden his eyes became fixed, and his whole countenance was suffused with an expression of the most intense amazement. His pipe fell from his mouth, his hands dropped to his sides, and he stood staring like a man possessed. Five or six yards away was Job Round, with a cigar cocked upwards from one corner of his mouth. He had taken a seat on the stump of a felled pollard in the midst of a circle of grass by the brook side,

and, bending forward with a light stick held in both hands between his knees, he regarded Mr. Bowling with an eye of waggish amusement.

'By the Lord!' said Mr. Bowling, 'I've come upon him.'

'Good morning,' said Job, in a casual tone. 'Nice weather, isn't it?' His voice was steady enough, but his eyes were alight with humour. Perhaps the humour was of a rather mischievous cast. There was something in the look which bred a change in Mr. Bowling's aspect anyhow, and that gentleman's expression changed from unmixed amazement to a doubtful discomfort. He dropped from the bank, picked up his fallen pipe, took a pull at it to see that it was still alight, and then took to staring again at Job as if he were an apparition from another world.

'I've come upon him,' he said again, after a lengthy pause; 'and I should have knowed him anywheres. Johnny, old pal, how are you? It does a man's heart good to come across a chum like this, after the expierance of a quarter of a centry.'

I thought you'd like to see me,' Job answered, with the mischievous smile still twinkling in his grey eyes. 'I was told you were to be found here, and I thought I'd give you the pleasure of a look at me. You don't seem to enjoy it nearly as much as I expected. You don't *look* as if it did a man's heart good to come across a chum like this after the expierance of a quarter of a centry. I'm afraid you're a bit of a flatterer, William, and that you don't greatly care to see me, after all.'

'Thomas,' said Mr. Bowling, correcting him in a surly way. 'Thomas Bowling; so christened at the port of Plymouth, in the year eighteen hundred.'

'And William Dean,' returned his companion, with humorous gravity; 'so christened at the port of Bristol. Wasn't it Bristol, William? And Robert Harford; so christened at the port of Liverpool. Was it Liverpool, Robert? Or London? I forget, after the expierance of a quarter of a centry.'

'You ain't altered much,' said Mr. Bowling,

staring at him gloomily. 'I should have knowed you anywheres.'

'And I should have known you also,' answered Job. 'But then, I marked you when I saw you last, and I recognise my own handiwork quite naturally.'

Mr. Bowling, still staring gloomily at Job, passed the middle finger of his left hand along the scar which disfigured his countenance, beginning at the forehead and ending at the lip. Then he traced it slowly back again.

'Make sure it's there, William,' said Job Round, with a somewhat savage badinage.

'Johnny,' said Mr. Bowling, 'let bygones be bygones. You can't deny as I was fair entitled to a half. Nayther can you deny, Johnny, as I never had so much as one piastre. I do look forrad to you for the fair thing now as I've happened upon you. I've had hard lines of it, roughing it everywheres, while you've been a-lying in the lap of plenty. Twelve 'ears afore the mahst, ill found, ill pervisioned, and wuss officered all along. Then

the diggin's, and as bad off there as ever. And you in the lap of plenty. Yes, Johnny, now as I have lighted upon you I must tell you as I do expect fair doos.'

'And may I ask,' said Job, with a smile which grew second by second more wicked in expression, 'may I ask what is your notion of fairness, now?'

'Why, certainly, you may, Johnny,' returned Mr. Bowling, with the manner of one who is ostentatiously open to the voice of reason. 'Halves is my notion of what the fair thing 'd be.'

'Halves?' demanded Job, with a look by this time grown menacing.

'Yes, Johnny,' replied Mr. Bowling, with a wandering eye. 'Halves 'd be the fair thing if we was to take it strict. The interest,' he added, with a clumsy pretence of making a generous allowance, 'is a thing I should leave for your own notions of what is the right way to deal with a old companion.'

'Considerate and generous to a fault, as

you always were,' said Job. 'And you really assure me that you would not press for interest?'.

'I should not, so to say, press for it,' Mr. Bowling answered. 'I should, upon the contrary, leave it with you, free to deal with as you seen proper.'

'I do not know enough how to admire you,' said Job, knocking the ash from his cigar with the end of his walking cane. Mr. Bowling ignored this compliment, and his wandering eyes were more uncertain in their gaze than ever. He made an effort to fix them upon Job's, but they slid away again to the sky, the fields, the road, the hedge, the brook, and rested upon nothing they could find.

'Bonnyvencher,' he said, after a while, 'took a fifth of the 'ole before he came into his fair share, as was arranged. Then him and the Greek shared half, and you and me was to have shared half.'

'Do you remember why we didn't share?'

The questioner was on his feet, and with a

stride or two was standing face to face with Mr. Bowling.

'Look at me,' he said, taking the sailor by the beard, and so holding him. 'Look at me. Do you remember why we didn't share?' Mr. Bowling's slippery glance just touched him once, and shot away from him. 'Do you remember,' Job asked a third time, speaking slowly and distinctly, 'why we didn't share?' Mr. Bowling made no answer, and Job, still holding him by the beard, shook him slowly, but very strongly, to and fro.

'Johnny,' he said feebly, 'you're a-hurting of me.'

'You thought it would be a great deal nicer not to share, didn't you, William? You thought, when we lay at that little khan at Strigli, that you saw your way to the lot, didn't you? But you are not a chemist, William, and arsenic taken in an overdose acts as an emetic. You know that now, don't you? That's a fact in medicine which will cling to your memory, my William, as long as my

reminder of it adorns your countenance.' He shook Mr. Bowling so by the beard at this point that his teeth chattered through the stem of the black clay, and the bowl, glancing from Job's arm, fell and broke in the roadway. Mr. Bowling's eye sought the shards and rested on them whilst Job went on: 'And you're vapouring about your buried treasure still? Now, I've a promise to make to you about that. You never knew me break my word yet, William, did you?'

'I can't say I ever did, Johnny,' returned Mr. Bowling, with great mildness.

'And you never will,' said Job. 'Now,'—very distinctly and with a shake at almost every word—'you speak a syllable about that matter any more and I'll finish you. I make myself quite clear to you, William?'

'I can't say you don't, Johnny,' said Mr. Bowling, still eyeing the shards. 'But I shouldn't make you out no worse if I wasn't shook so.'

Job gave him a final shake and released him.

'I shall find a way to quiet you if you speak another word about that. And you'll know me, you'll talk about me, you'll breathe my name to anybody known to me when you are tired of life, but not before. There's no mistake in your mind as to what I mean, is there, William? No point that stands in need of clearing up?'

'Oh dear no, Johnny,' Mr. Bowling answered, with a backward step or two.

'That is well,' said Job. 'When you are quite tired of living, William, you can begin about the buried treasure once more, or you can tell a friend you know me, and I'll attend to you without loss of time.'

With that he turned about slowly and walked away. Mr. Bowling, looking after him with a crestfallen visage, suddenly plucked up heart of grace enough to follow him.

'Johnny,' he said submissively, 'you've had your say, and I've been quiet all along.

I ain't a-going to breathe a synnable nayther, but I'm a older man than you, and I'm a-getting on in 'ears, I am, and where's my pervision for old age? And you in the lap of plenty all along.' He ventured to look at Job at this point, and the smile he saw seemed to freeze him for a moment, but after a pause he dared to go on again. 'I don't ask for half, Johnny —no, nor yet a quarter. But isn't there nothing for a old chum?'

'I'm afraid there's nothing for the old chum,' Job answered, taking Mr. Bowling by the beard once more—'nothing. People who want to be kindly remembered should not administer arsenic to their companions, William. In your day the curriculum of the workhouse school did not include lessons in chemistry, and for that oversight of the authorities you suffer, even in your old age.'

'Not a pound a week?' demanded Mr. Bowling. 'Not twenty shillin' a week, to keep a pal from the workus?'

'Not a dry crust to keep a pal from dying

of starvation, William,' said Job, with a dreadful playfulness which frightened the other more than any violence or bluster would have done. 'You will find it safer not to follow me another foot, or to speak another word to me.'

Mr. Bowling stood stock still and silent, and Job Round went his way in earnest this time. The old chum watched him until he rounded the corner, and stood staring vacantly in the same direction for a long time after he had disappeared.

'If I'd knowed,' said Mr. Bowling then, rubbing at the back of his neck to take the stiffness out of it—'if I'd knowed as he was in the neighbourwood, I'd ha' steered clear of it. And yet I shou'dn't ha' thought as he'd ha' been so bitter. And I was a pretty donkey, to be sure, to snap at the shadder an' lose the substance in that sort of a manner.'

Mr. Bowling's appetite for work—never very exigent—was altogether spoiled, and he sat him upon the bank below the hedge and surveyed the landscape with a look of weary disgust. In

the meantime Job strolled homewards with an impassive look, nodding a salutation here and there to an early-rising acquaintance. By the time he reached his own door the sun was pretty high, and the long summer day had set in severely. The shaded room in which the breakfast table was arranged was a picture of cool neatness. The smooth, uncarpeted red quarries of the floor, the snow-white linen, the live plants and flowers that filled the wide fireplace, and the rustling, sunlit greenery out of doors were all pleasant to the eye, and all carried with them a pleasant sense of coolness. Job looked upon these things, and heaved a great sigh as he threw his hat and cane carelessly upon a sofa, and bestowed his own massive figure in a lounging chair.

A second or two later Sarah came in with a vase of fresh-gathered flowers, which she set upon the table.

'You were out early this morning, father,' she said brightly.

'By Jove!' said Job, sitting bolt upright

and looking at her from head to foot, 'you're growing to be an uncommonly handsome woman, my dear.'

'You dear old goose,' said Sarah in response, and, crossing over to him, she bent down and kissed his brown forehead. '*You* mustn't take to spoiling me.'

'I suppose you found out the truth about that matter before I did,' returned her father. 'It came upon me as a sort of surprise, my dear. You're growing into a woman, and an uncommonly good-looking one into the bargain.'

She dragged at him by both hands and led him gaily to the table, where she sat down opposite to him and began to pour out the coffee. He, leaning his arms upon the table, watched her with an affectionately observant smile, thinking, with fatherly pride, how well she justified his praises. And, indeed, you might have walked a long way without meeting another such piece of feminine majesty and sweetness. Her polished white arms were well-nigh as massive as her father's, and her

firm, round throat was like a marble column. But the large-limbed, generous mould in which her figure was cast had not a line of coarseness in it, and was to the full as fine as if she had been modelled in the slenderest proportions. Her face had a sort of artless courage in its expression which was very womanly and engaging, and her look commonly alternated between a mild seriousness and a dimpled mischief.

Just now, beneath her father's persistent gaze, it wore neither of these expressions, but a very becoming blush settled upon it, and seemed to make the downcast eyelids a little heavy. She raised her brown eyes shyly for a moment and dropped them again.

'My lass,' said Job, taking the cup she proffered him and holding it at arm's length as he spoke, 'a father can never altogether fill a mother's place, but you've never had any doubt of my affection for you?'

'No,' she answered, with an accent of surprise which made the denial a hundred times more emphatic.

'I have always meant that we should be close friends,' said Job, setting the cup before him, 'and if you had had the misfortune to be born a lad'—he put that in to save his speech from too much seriousness, and spoke the words with half a laugh in his voice—'we should have found it easier and easier as you grew up. But a tough-hided hippopotamus of an old fellow like me can't expect to have a swan for his constant companion, even if he and the swan do swim in the same family waters. You're growing up to be a woman, Sarah, and there's just a chance of our being pushed apart——'

'How can you say so, father?' cried the girl, in a pained voice.

'There's a chance of it, my dear,' he said slowly. 'There's a certainty of it, unless we both take care. We mustn't lose each other's confidence, sweetheart, that's all. You'll be having sweethearts by-and-by, and having 'em in plenty, unless I'm much mistaken. And when you come to favour one of 'em'—he

stretched his hand across the table and pinched her ear—'you must let the old dad know who it is, and take him into confidence.'

He spoke lightly, and with a manner more than half jocular, but he was serious enough for all that, and perhaps his daughter knew it. In any case the blush mantled higher on her face, and she took an unusual and unnecessary interest in the pattern of the table-cloth, tracing the Greek key upon it with a pink-flushed finger-nail. Suddenly she shook her head as if to shake away the shyness that oppressed her, though when she looked at him her eyes were still heavy with it as if with sleep.

'You won't want to know before I know myself, will you?' she asked, with a transparent pretence of impudence.

'I foresaw that difficulty,' he answered. 'It *is* a difficulty, but it is to be got over. And the way to get over it is to have no pretences, dear, no needless hiding of the thing. If a lad comes a-courting, Sarah, let him come to the old man's fireside like a lad who knows his

mind, and has no right to be ashamed of himself.'

The girl made no answer, but a man who flattered himself upon his knowledge of the sex might have thought that she looked a little guilty. A young woman can defend her lips when she happens to be built on the lines of Juno, and there were not many young men in Castle Barfield who would have found it an easy task to snatch a kiss from Sarah if she had been disposed to resist him. It was a place where a kiss was not greatly thought of, and the swains and damsels of the district would have a right hearty tussle over the attempt at such a salute upon occasion, with the seniors laughing and looking on. But no young man had ever ventured on that enterprise with Miss Round—except it were beneath the harmless mistletoe or in the last figure of Sir Roger de Coverley at Christmas time—until that identical morning.

Aaron had arisen early, and, finding the cowherd of the Barfield Arms already astir and

away to the field with his pails, had slipped out at the back gates in his company, and, having sighted Job Round's dreaded figure and watched it into distance, had dared to approach the cottage and to throw a pebble or two at Sarah's window. Now, even according to Castle Barfield etiquette, that is going a long way with a young lady, and may fairly be regarded as equivalent to a declaration of intentions. Aaron had never made such a stride before, and he trembled for the result, but if Sarah chose to offer no remark upon it, but to greet him when she came out upon the garden path as if he had chosen the very commonest way of making a morning call, he might surely believe himself welcome. And in courtships one thing has such a knack of leading to another. From throwing pebbles at a young woman's bedroom window to kissing a young woman's fingers is an advance so natural and so easy, that one might fairly wonder if the one had never followed the other before the day of Aaron and Sarah. It is likely enough that the

advance from the fingers to the lips was made before the earliest days of Castle Barfield.

Job was unsuspicious, and over-inclined to believe in the weight of his own authority. He had expressed a very unfavourable opinion of Mr. Aaron Whittaker only yesterday afternoon, and Sarah would naturally take that opinion into consideration, and, if she had any fancy in the young man's favour, would of course abandon it. It never entered his mind that a lover's kiss had brought so much of the woman into his daughter's face that he himself had seen and noted it.

Sitting in his garden that afternoon, beneath a hoary and gnarled old apple tree, with his pipe in his mouth and a volume of Shakespeare in his hands, he read tranquilly through the tragedy of 'Hamlet,' until he came upon that curious question propounded by King Claudius—'Can one be pardoned and retain the offence?' He dropped the book upon the grass, and took to striding to and fro with his shaggy red-brown eyebrows close knitted.

'"Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children,"' he muttered, '"even unto the second and third generation." It's no use fighting against *that*. The money was ill come by, and there's blood upon it, thieves and scoundrels as the fellows were. That rascal's turning up again has brought it all back into my mind as fresh as if it were yesterday. Sarah's innocent. It isn't as if she knew how the money came. She doesn't even know that it exists, for that matter. But will it prosper with her? "Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children." She might be none the worse off if she never knew of it. As for me, I've run up my score, and I must pay it. I shan't run whining at the finish, trying to slink in with the fellows who have played squarely all their lives. Though where *they* are I don't know. I never met 'em. Armstrong's one, perhaps; the only one I ever knew. And Grace—poor Grace! And Sarah; she's a good girl, and a Christian into the bargain. There may be many.'

Up and down, up and down the smiling

garden, all dappled with shine and shade. The solid, resolute footstep, the bent head, and the face frowning with intense thought gave no hint of the tremendous storm which raged within the man. The words he muttered gave no adumbration of it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE lapse of a quarter of a century had made little or no change in the outward aspects of the Armstrong *ménage*. The legend of the 'Stanhope Press' had been once repainted above the white-curtained domestic windows, and was now just as sun-faded and blistered as it had used to be, and the name of William Armstrong above the business window was no more shadowy than of old. Castle Barfield High Street generally had developed a taste for plate-glass windows, but the old-fashioned one-and-twenty panes, with the stained-glass announcement of patent medicines in the centre, still fenced the meagre show of stationery, books, and weekly journals. Within doors there were visible signs of decrepitude in the furniture, most of which was rheumatic·

with old age. The grey little man himself was greyer still and smaller still than he had been, being by this time bowed and shrivelled by many years of troubles, large and small, but his face was full of tranquil patience, and bright with a mild unquenchable humour. He sat in a high-backed spidery oaken armchair beside the drowsy and ash-grown fire, and Mrs. Armstrong, plump and large, sat opposite with a heap of stockings in her lap. Sarah Round sat near with a hand on the elder woman's chair, and the three kept silence, whilst a solemn eight-day clock in a recess said anything a listener's languid fancy might give him to say, and, having once begun, clung to his theme with a terrible tenacity.

'It'd be a lonely house now, Sarah,' said Mrs. Armstrong, gathering the heap of stockings together and laying them on a table at her side, 'if it wasn't for you and your father at times.'

'I suppose so, grandmother,' said Sarah; 'they're all away now.'

work to keep my hands off him.' She paused there to laugh, with such heartiness that all her buxom figure shook with mirth, and added, with a seriousness as sudden and unexpected as her laughter, 'He never did a wrong thing in all his days. There isn't his match for anything in Castle Barfield. He's the best man *I* ever saw, Sarah, and I hope you may get a quarter as good a husband when your time comes. You'll never hurt if that happens. But I get that angry at him sometimes as I wish I'd never seen him. William, do wake up, for goodness' sake!'

At this instant the shop-bell rang, and Armstrong, rising mechanically, went out to answer the summons.

'That's somebody for a penny postage-stamp, *I* know,' said Mrs. Armstrong, 'or else a lost child as wants to know where the parish crier lives, so as he can get himself inquired for. There never was such a trade as ourn, I do believe.' She laughed again at her own queru-

lousness, and as she wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron said, 'It's kept we now for forty 'ears, bad as it is, and we've a many reason to be thankful. Why, bless my heart, Sarah, it's your grandfather Round. Come in, Mr. Round, and sit down.'

The five-and-twenty years had not passed by without leaving a mark or two upon Ezekiel in their course. He still clung to the sartorial devices of his later middle age, and his red plush waistcoat and corduroy smalls, his brass-buttoned blue coat, high collars, and beaver hat were reckoned antediluvian amongst the sprightlier and younger sort of folk in Castle Barfield. So fast does time fly in lively places, and a thing of such limited grasp is the human memory. Except for a fringe of angry red hair, he was bald; the bulldog pugnacity of his expression was aggravated by years, and his hands, which were two or three sizes too large for him, had quite an indescribable air of being perpetually held in readiness for a fight.

They might have had a separate life of their own, and have spent their time in one eternal dream of fisticuffs.

'How be *you*, mum?' said Ezekiel, jerking his head towards Mrs. Armstrong as if he wished to throw it at her. 'And how be you, Sarah? Where's your dooty? Ain't you got a kiss for your grandfather?'

'Of course I have, grandfather,' responded Sarah, rising and kissing him. Ezekiel took the salute as a gatepost would have done, and, sitting in the chair Mrs. Armstrong had placed for him, laid his hat carefully upon the floor, fished out from it with the crook of his walking-stick a red cotton handkerchief, polished his bald head with it, and dropped it back into the hat.

'Nice weather for the time o' 'ear, this is,' he said then, turning an aggressive countenance on Armstrong, as if he held him answerable for the ground of his complaint. 'Here's a heast wind a-blowin' as if it was Michaelmas. Anny-body sin my son Job? Here, Sarer, you're his

da'ter, an' yo' ought to know how he is if anybody does. How's he a-gettin' on, like?'

'Oh, father's very well indeed, grandfather,' returned the girl. 'Why don't you come and see us?'

'I mak no doubt he's well enough,' returned Ezekiel, ignoring her question, 'an' I do suppose he's as cussid as iver he was. There's more obstinaycy an' Oh-be-damnedness about our Job, Armstrong, than theer is about iver another mon i' Castle Barfield. It's welly a lifetime sence he left my doors, and he's niver set a foot acrost 'em sence.'

'Why don't you come and see us, grandfather?' Sarah asked again.

'Ah,' replied Ezekiel, 'why don't I? It's likely I'm agooin' to set foot i' my son's house when he won't set foot i' mine! Oh, ah! That's a likely stoory, to be sure, that is.'

'I'm sure, grandfather, that father would be glad to see you, and would make you welcome.'

'I mak no doubt upon it,' said Ezekiel with

a jeer. 'He'd like to see me knuckle under and be the first to mak approach. It's a sperit as I can't abide, Armstrong. It's a thing as I cannot away with, and as I will not bow down to. "Honour thy father," is what the Scripter says, and I had to do it when I were a lad, an' if I hadn't ha' done it I should ha' had such a hidin' I shouldn't ha' stood upright for a day or two. Wherefor I honoured my father i' my day, an' I expect Job to do it in his'n.'

'Ah, William,' said Mrs. Armstrong, 'there's a pair of 'em. Like two dogs at a clean-scraped bone. Nayther'll let it go for fear the other might get first bite, and there's nothing on it after all.'

Armstrong said nothing, but, rising from his chair, reached up to the high mantel-shelf for his pipe, and, having found it, pushed a scrap of paper through the bars of the grate, and stirred it about there in the hope of getting a light.

'A mon might come an' talk his head off i'

this house,' said Ezekiel, 'an' niver get a answer.'

'He that meddleth in a quarrel that concerneth him not,' returned the placid old Scotchman, 'is like one that setteth a dog by the ears. Ye had my opinion on this topic twenty years ago, Mr. Round, and ye've had it repeated once a month or thereabouts ever since.'

'Ah!' said Ezekiel, 'this is the shop to come tew for sympathy, this is!'

'You're like a child boohooing that he's hungry,' returned Armstrong, 'with his porridge smoking under his nose. If you're hungry, feed away, man. D'y' expect the porridge to lose patience, and take to feeding you against your will?'

'I wish you'd mean summat when you tak to talkin',' said the impenetrable old dog, and straightway Mrs. Armstrong broke into a fit of laughter. Sarah hung her head that her grandfather might not see that she was smiling, and Armstrong, having at last got his scrap of

paper to ignite, set the flame to his pipe and leaned back in his chair, smoking with undisturbed serenity.

'You've got a lot to loff at,' growled Ezekiel, surveying the poor apartment scornfully.

'Bless the men!' cried Mrs. Armstrong, with a gasp of recovery. 'They'm funnier than a Punch and Judy! They'm that outside one another and apart from one another, Sarah, it's as good as a play to listen to 'em.'

'There's them i' Castle Barfield,' said Ezekiel with deliberate scorn, 'as sets up Armstrong to be a man o' sense an' wisdom. He niver waasted none on 'em o' me, I knowin' that much.'

'Well,' said Armstrong, 'I'll waste a little now. Did y' ever repent of turning your son out of doors?' The old man's hands quivered a little on the crook of his walking-stick, and he stared hard and breathed hard at his questioner. 'I know very well ye did.'

'No,' said Ezekiel obstinately. 'I was i' the right, an' Job was i' the wrong.'

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Armstrong, 'it's well known what he is, William. Don't speak another word to him.'

'I niver leave this house,' Ezekiel retorted, 'without bein' thankful as I'm a widerer.'

Armstrong ignored this passage-at-arms, and went on quietly.

'All the while the lad was away ye were breaking your heart, and ye're just th' unhappiest old man at this minute in the kingdom. Ye have a tender spot in ye, and ye're ashamed of it. The lad suffered a great wrong at your hands, and it's your place to go up to him and make the first advances. Ye cursed him in this very house, and bade him darken your doors no more.'

'He might ha' come back,' said Ezekiel. 'When he come home again to Castle Barfield I'd ha' took him back again if he'd ha' come. He knowed I would, but he's that cussid an' hard, an' that unbendin' as he wouldn't come anigh his own father.'

'Did ye tell him he was welcome back

again?' asked the Scot gravely. 'Did ye take the curses off his head? Was there ever one friendly word spoken to the lad by his own father? Man, man—ye're gettin' auld, and before long you'll be at your last account.'

'Talk Scripter by all manner o' means!' cried the grim old fellow. 'But am I th' on'y one to blaam? Has my son Job been i' the right all the while? Moughtn't he ha' come up to me 'ears an' 'ears ago, an' ha' put forrad a hand to his father?'

'You're not altogether responsible for your son's shortcomings,' Armstrong answered, 'but ye just have to balance your own book. Put your pride in your pocket, Round, and go to your lad and just say nothing at all beyond telling him ye'll be right-down glad to see him any hour he'll call.'

'I am going home now, grandfather,' said Sarah, rising and laying her hand upon his shoulder. 'Will you come with me?'

'No,' he said roughly, pushing her hand away with his own, and rubbing at the place

where it had rested. 'Bring him to me, an' I'll be glad to see him, but I'll niver set foot beyand his doorpost till he comes into my house and maks friends again.'

Sarah, standing behind her grandfather's chair, caught Armstrong's glance, and nodded to him to say no more.

'Will you see me home, grandfather?' she asked.

'I'll do that,' he answered, 'willin' an' free,' and stooping for his hat he arranged the red handkerchief inside it, and then set it on his head and nodded a surly good night to Armstrong.

'Your father's a hard un—a bitter hard un, Sarer,' he said, as he and the girl came upon the street together.

'Now, grandfather,' said the girl, taking one of his unyielding fists and tucking it within her arm, 'you mustn't say unpleasant things about father to me. There isn't a better father or a better man in the world. And as for you, grandfather, it's not a bit of use for you to

pretend with me. You want us all to think that you are a very wicked old man, and harder and bitterer than anybody else in the world. I don't know why you take a pride in persuading people to think such things, but they're not true, and you would be a great deal happier if you gave up pretending.'

'Oh!' said Ezekiel, 'you'm i' the right on it, i' stickin' up for your own father. But he's been a bad son to me, Sarer.'

'How dare you say so, you wicked old man?' returned his granddaughter, with much severity of manner. 'The very last time you saw him you swore at him; Grandfather Armstrong says you did. Never you let *me* hear you swear. And you turned him out of house and home, and you told him never to darken your doors again. And all for what? Because he loved my poor mamma and wanted to marry her. Yes, and he did marry her, you bad-hearted man, and he didn't care about her being poor—what man would care about a girl being poor if he loved her?—and now you

haven't got a soul to leave your money to, for you dare not leave it to father, and I wouldn't touch a penny of it.'

This speech was delivered with impressive and unfeminine slowness, and in a voice curiously grave and sweet—a full contralto which was in perfect keeping with the girl's liberally moulded limbs and her uncommon stature.

'Be you agoin' to turn agin me?' said Ezekiel, with a whine.

'What do you expect if you abuse my father to my face?' asked Sarah. 'If you act badly I shall do my duty as your granddaughter and tell you of it. I shall talk to you pretty roundly by-and-by, sir, if you don't mend.'

Ezekiel, having been a tyrant all his life, had found somebody to tyrannise over him in his old age. Taking it all together, he rather liked it than not, though he made occasional protests of freedom, and submission and rebellion checkered each other about as equally as the black and white on a chess-board.

'Is that how you talkin' to your elders?' he said, making an effort to assert himself.

'When they deserve it,' answered Sarah, with absolute gravity; 'not otherwise. I have a very great mind that until you behave yourself properly to my father, I'll never speak to you again. I'm not quite sure that it's dutiful in me to speak to you while you are on such bad terms with my father.'

'Goo it!' cried Ezekiel, 'goo it, my gell! I shan't worrit nobody much longer. I'm as lone as death a'ready pretty nigh, an' I shall be as happy under churchyard mould as ever I've been above it this last five-and-twenty 'ear. They've all been again me from the first; theer eeat been a one on 'em as has took my side. Theer's Clem Bache, as I've gi'en maney an' maney a sixpence to when he was a lad, an' allays was kind to, though he *is* a cripple, an' he walks by me i' the very street, 'ithout as much as sayin', "How be you, Mr. Round?" Theer's ne'er a soul i' Castle Barfield as ain't

been upset again me all along. An' now my gran'child's turnin' sour on my hands.'

'Do you think they would all be against you if you had been in the right?' asked Sarah. 'Oh no, grandfather. If you are lonely in your old age, whose fault is it? If you go to your own fireside to-night and have nobody to talk to, whose fault is it? You've only to ask father, and I know that he'll be friends again. He bears no malice, but how can you expect him to come to you when you've never taken back the dreadful words you used to him, and when you have never spoken to him all these years?'

'Ah!' said Ezekiel, looking as dour as a bulldog, 'they'd like to see me a-knucklin' under. That ud be a noo sight for 'em, that would. But they'n niver witness it. Nobody iver knowed me to gi' myself in i' the wrong.'

'And you will die without asking your only child to see you?' said the girl.

'Die?' replied the old man. 'Who's a-

talkin' about dyin'? Theer's life i' me for maney 'ears yit, please God.'

'Well, here's the gate, grandfather.' The old fellow drew his sullen, pugnacious fist from the hollow of her arm. 'Can't I persuade you to come in?' she asked. 'Won't you come, for my sake, grandfather?'

'What?' cried Ezekiel, with a fierce quaver in his voice. 'Don't try to wheedle *me*, my wench! Niver try to wheedle *me*!'

'Shall I tell him from you that you will be glad to see him? Shall I tell him that you want to see him?'

The surly, obstinate old rascal began to shake and quaver, insomuch that his stick rattled on the dry little pebbles of the roadway. The girl bent down and took both his hands in hers, and her beautiful face came close to him in the twilight.

'Let me make you happy, grandfather,' she said. 'Let me give you the wish of your heart.'

'Yo' can tell him,' said Ezekiel, with an

exaggerated surliness of demeanour, and a gruffer voice than common, 'as if he likes to come an' mek it up, I'm willin'. Yo' can tell him as theer's nobody so welcome i' my house as he'll be if he likes to come to it.'

'God bless you, dear!' she said, and, stooping a little nearer, kissed him on the cheek.

'Mind you,' said Ezekiel, 'it eeat to b' understood as I've knocked under.'

'Don't spoil a good deed, grandfather,' the girl besought him. 'Go home now, dear, and he shall follow you directly.'

She left him there, and opening the gate ran down the path, and, finding the door beneath the porch ajar, entered that way. The front room was dark except for a solitary pencil of light which came through the inner doorway, and evidenced the presence of a lamp beyond. She had scarce discerned even this when she heard a voice speaking within, and the agonised accent seemed to strike all life and power of motion from her limbs.

'For her sake,' said her father's voice,' 'O Lord, for her sake take the curse away. Her hands are clean, her soul is innocent. Avenge my sins on me alone, and visit not the blameless for the guilty.'

The ponderous tones throbbed with passionate entreaty, and a something electric in the voice touched the unwilling listener with a thrill and tremor such as she had never felt before. The stillness which followed on the words seemed to hum and murmur in her ears, and her heart beat—or so she fancied—audibly. A wild sob broke the silence, and the girl stepped back without a sound, wringing her hands tightly together. She ran trembling on tiptoe to the gate and clung to it, feeling as if her feet had profaned some place of awful sanctity. She had never known her father pray before, but had prayed for him in her childish and maidenly devotions a thousand times, and now she had surprised a secret which was sacred beyond measure.

All this at first,—and then—the words. He

was praying for her—that the curse might be removed from her! What curse? But she had no right to question of this thing, no right to let a curious thought dwell upon it for an instant.

Whilst she yet stood at the gate, the moon, which at this season of the month was tardy in rising, stole up above the trees at the rear of the cottage, and in its dreamlike light the girl watched the quiet road before her as if in a dream, until her father's heavy footfall on the paved yard awoke her. She moved the latch of the gate softly and without noise, and was about to slip into the road, when she changed her mind and allowed the gate to fall back into its place with a clatter.

'Is that you, Sarah?' said her father, as he came round the cottage to meet her. His tones were usual, and when he stooped to kiss her, as he always did after any little absence of howsoever brief duration, she could see in the moonlight that his face was calm.

'Father,' she said, reaching both hands to his shoulder and knitting her fingers together over it,

'say "no" to anything else I may ask you, but say "yes" to this. I have seen Grandfather Round. He wants to be friends with you. He told me to tell you that there was nobody so welcome in his house as you would be if you would only go there.'

'And you want me to go, sweetheart?' asked Job.

'I do so want you to go to him,' she answered. 'I have been talking to him to-night, and he says he feels as lonely as death, and that he will be as happy under churchyard mould as ever he has been above it this last five-and-twenty years. He wants to see you, dear.'

'Is he at home?' said her father. 'I'll go at once. He had only need to say much less than that at any time.'

So without more ado Job Round passed out at the garden gate and walked along the High Street to his father's door. The old man stood in the doorway.

'You'n been a long time mekin' up your mind, Job,' he said. It was five-and-twenty

years to a day since they had last spoken to each other, and both had that fact in mind.

'I would have come at any time,' said Job, 'if I had had a sign that you cared to have me here.'

'Thee'st shake hands, Job?' the old mastiff answered, with a growl. 'Wooten't?'

'With all my heart,' said Job.

'Come in,' mumbled Ezekiel, and his son followed him into the well-remembered room. 'Do you tek anythink to drink of a evenin'? You've growed, Job.'

It was not an eloquent reception, but the visitor was satisfied with it. A great love and a great fear in his own heart were beginning to work an alteration in him.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was something of a sense of holiday-making about a summer Sunday in Castle Barfield. For one thing, people lay luxuriously abed with the certainty that though broad daylight had arrived no nimble ninepence was afield to tempt and reward the chase. For another thing, when they did get up they dressed themselves in other and finer garments than they usually wore. Again, before trying on the false shirt-front and tall collars, it was reasonable to have a lazy lounging half-hour over breakfast, and to take it in one's clean shirt sleeves, whilst seated on the front doorstep of the house in view of the sunlit street and of many neighbours occupied in a like manner. And then, somehow, the church-bells, though possibly not provocative of merriment to church-

goers, made rare music for idle fellows who were only above ground occasionally, and who found the fields and green lanes a pleasant change from the black depths of the coal-mine, and the act of doing nothing, one dare fancy, a pleasant change from the labour of the week. If the church bells brought an invitation to worship to the ears of one in five in Castle Barfield, they brought to the remaining four news of immunity from labour, clear visions of open spaces, of wheat fields with the scarlet poppy beaming here and there, of trees prodigal of shade above the sun-beaten lanes, and willows drawing their lower boughs through the clear waters of the brook.

Even to-day, when almost everything is changed, the ladies of Castle Barfield wear fuller colours than find acceptance in fashionable places, but five-and-twenty years ago they shone in reds, and blues, and greens, and yellows—not mere tones of colour, but colours absolute, positive, unmistakable—and that she was happiest who most unendurably smote the

eye of the observer. And what with the sunshine and those amazing dresses and ribbons, and the pealing of the bells, and the cartloads of Sunday merry-makers who went that way towards the country, the road to the old church was bright indeed. A cartload of merry-makers comprised as many men and women as a cart could hold, and the best of men (on Sundays) disdained to be merciful to his beast. The pigeon-flyers, each carrying his bird in a square little wooden box pierced all over with airholes, mixed with the church-going crowd, and were, for some occult reason, supposed to be Sabbath-breakers of the blackest sort. They used a good deal of coarse language, to be sure, but then it was the only tongue they knew, and its grisly expletives and adjectives meant nothing, and, unless to the cause of good taste, did little harm.

It surprised a good many of the old church-goers to see Job Round walking churchwards with his daughter on his arm. That was a spectacle Castle Barfield had never seen before,

and it was known that since his return to his birthplace Job had been within the walls of a church but three times—once to marry and once to bury his wife, and once to attend his daughter's christening. But when Sarah entered at the porch Job took placidly to wandering about the graveyard reading the inscriptions on the tombstones, and by-and-by, when the organ began to drone and murmur within the building, he sat down beside a railed monument and lit a pipe. It was a blazing day, and the windows of the church were open, so that the voice of the curate was now and then distinct to him, though it mostly sounded like a mere rumble in the echoing building. The hymn and the simple anthem reached him quite clearly, and filled him with all manner of vague and confused feelings and memories. He remembered just such a day as this, more than five-and-thirty years ago, when he had played truant from Sunday-school, and, running down the dusty road outside the graveyard, had

heard the organ playing and the people singing that same old hymn—

> They and the hills on which they grow
> Are sometimes hurried far away,
> And leap like hinds that bounding go,
> Or unicorns in youthful play.

He recalled his youthful astonishment at these lines when he had first encountered them in the new version of the psalms fitted to the tunes sung in churches. He had scarce smiled at this memory when he fell to thinking of his mother and his wife, and was moved to rise and seek out their burial-places. There are men to whom the graceful emotions come easily, who have an enjoyable tear at command at any moment, in readiness for any call the little heart (or the feeble nerves which act as the heart's locum tenens) may make upon it; but he was not of that kidney, and there was no sign of feeling visible about him. He stood a long time before each grave, until at last, broad daylight though it was, a strange creeping feeling of half-terror got hold of him at the

thought that the mother and the wife might be near him. Well—he and they would meet no more. They had both been saints upon earth, and had gone into the sacred gladness appointed for them and their like, and he and they would meet no more.

'Grace would be glad to see me,' he said to himself, with a simple gravity, 'and so would poor old mother. But it is to be hoped that God keeps the concerns of this beastly little planet out of the minds of His angels. They are happy, and they couldn't be happy if they remembered me. I suppose they'd know everything if they knew me now at all.'

He was standing before his mother's headstone as these thoughts crossed him, and he stooped mechanically to pick away a little of the moss which obscured her name. The moss clung as if it were part of the stone, and he drew out his pocket-knife and fell to scraping it away. Murmurs floated through the open windows of the church, footsteps and voices of passers-by sounded clear in the lane beside

him. He was dreaming over his task, and his fingers were moving more and more slowly and automatically, when a voice startled him wide awake.

'Mornin', sir,' said the voice. 'Fine sort o' ripenin' weather for the wheat this is.'

'I'm very glad to have met you, Bowling,' said another voice in answer. 'Will you earn a shilling by carrying this little packet for me? Wait a moment whilst I write the address. Job Round, Esquire, Konak Cottage, High Street, Castle Barfield. Anybody will tell you where it is. If Mr. Round is at home, tell him who sent it, and say that I had meant to bring it myself, but that I found the heat a little fatiguing. There is no answer. There's your shilling. Thank you.'

'Poor Clem!' said Job to himself: 'this is one of his bad days. I can tell that by his voice.'

'Thanky, sir,' said Mr. Bowling respectfully. 'I'll walk down there now. My ways are not particular of a Sunday.'

'This happens fortunately,' mused Job, still kneeling on the churchyard grass, whilst the footsteps faded out of hearing. 'Mr. Bowling is on his way to a new astonishment, and it will be as well for him to get it over. He has not yet identified John Smith with Job Round, Esquire, and since he is bound to do it he had better do it when the two gentlemen rolled into one stand in the flesh before him.'

As he moved to regain his feet he laid one hand upon the tombstone, and had half arisen, when the name, newly scraped clear of its encrusting mosses, caught his eye, and he dropped back upon the grass again and withdrew his hand, as if the stone had suddenly grown red-hot. For a single second or less there was a vivid horror in his eyes, and this having vanished as quickly as it came he stared gloomily awhile at the stone; and as he rose he said, half aloud: 'Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed! . . . There's a thing for a son to have lived to be thankful for!'

He walked slowly away, striding deliberately over the grassy mounds, and in a little while his face assumed its usual look of tranquil defiance. When he came upon the road he could make out the sailor's figure in the distance, and, setting after it at a good round pace, presently diverged from the street and struck a short cut across the fields. Walking at the same brisk rate he reached the cottage, and sat down to await the arrival of the messenger. Probably Mr. Bowling found the High Street deserted at that hour on a Sunday morning, and Job saw him pass the gate twice before he could make up his mind about the cottage. Shortly after the second passing he returned, and leaning his elbows on the gate took a leisurely stare about him, and finally pushed the gate aside and came, with his rolling nautical step, along the gravelled pathway. The owner of the cottage—himself concealed by the thin lace window-curtains—watched, with something of the smile he had worn at their interview of a week or two before, and

even chuckled with a grim merriment as the man came unconsciously along.

'I seem fated to astonish you, Thomas,' he said when Mr. Bowling knocked, and rising from his seat he flung the door open and faced his visitor. 'Well,' he asked, 'what do *you* want here?'

'I've made a error,' said Mr. Bowling humbly. 'I'm a-looking for Konak Cawtage.'

'This is Konak Cottage,' said Job. 'What do you want here?'

'I've got a bit of a package for Job Round, Esquire,' returned Mr. Bowling.

'Very good,' said Job, stretching out his hand.

'I was to give it to the gentleman,' said Mr. Bowling, as yet unsuspicious, but desiring to give a little unnecessary trouble if it could be safely done.

'Very well,' answered Job with a matter-of-fact manner. 'Where is it?'

'I was to give it to Job Round, Esquire,' said Mr. Bowling.

'Then give it to Job Round, Esquire,' replied Job, 'and go about your business.'

Mr. Bowling began to stare, and Job looked calmly over his head at the street beyond.

'Job Round, Esquire,' said the messenger feebly.

'Precisely,' returned the other, with a dry delight in tormenting him. 'And Mr. Bache, who paid you just tenpence too much for this small service, entrusted you with a message for me. But I am treating so old and warm a friend a little coldly, I'm afraid. Come in, William.'

Mr. Bowling, led by the beard, entered the cottage with a crestfallen and bewildered aspect, and Job was obviously amused at him.

'You are not an ornament to a parlour, William,' he said, still holding him by the beard, 'and I will trouble you to come into the kitchen. Thank you. Take a seat.' Being compelled into a chair, and then released, Mr. Bowling looked about him more vacuously than before. 'Discharge your little commission,

William,' said his tormentor. 'Let me have the packet addressed to me.'

The messenger, who wore a corduroy coat in honour of the day, groped in the inner breast-pockets, and after a good deal of uncertain fumbling produced his trust and handed it to Job, who leisurely broke the cord which surrounded the packet.

'Your features, William,' he said with a twinkling gravity, 'are charged with an expression of surprise. If I may venture to interpret that expression, I should assume that you had not expected to find me here. One might have thought that the name of the cottage would have awakened some memory of your sojourn in the East, and would have prepared for another pleasant little revival of your Eastern memories. But the message, William? What was the message?'

'Mr. Bache given me the package,' said William with exceeding feebleness, 'and he said he would ha' brought it himself, but he found the 'eat a little tiring.'

'A poor memory,' answered Job, 'always a poor memory. Fatiguing was the word he used, wasn't it, William?'

'I will not tell a lie to a old companion,' said Mr. Bowling, with an unsuccessful attempt to seem at ease. 'Fatiguing was the word, now that I come to think upon it.'

He was reduced to a condition altogether abject, and sat looking about him with shifty eyes, whilst Job, standing in front of him, opened the little packet and drew from it some loose printed sheets, which he turned over with the face of a man well pleased. By-and-by something attracted his attention, and he began to read. The printed pages came between his face and Mr. Bowling's, and Mr. Bowling evidently found comfort in that fact, and began slowly to gather his scattered wits together. Job continuing to read with an oblivion of Mr. Bowling's presence, which was perhaps a little ostentatious, the scarred man began to look about him with some keenness of observation, to notice the extreme simplicity of the apart-

ment, its smallness, and the positive scantiness of the furniture. This survey completed, it was not unnatural, since Job stood within a yard of him, that he should turn his regards from the house to its master. Everything Job wore was well made and of good material, but was simple in style and carelessly worn, and there was nothing in his aspect which argued of wealth to the observer's eyes.

'Fifty thousand pound?' said Mr. Bowling, inwardly. 'He doesn't look as if he'd ever owned fifty thousand penny pieces. Got through it, I reckon. Ah! the spree a man *could* have with a sum like that!'

He sighed audibly, and the reader, with his face still hidden by the printed pages, twinkled for an instant and immediately became grave again.

Now whilst Job read on with an intentness much more apparent than real, Mr. Bowling's eyes became fixed with an expression of interest upon a trinket which hung from his companion's watch-chain, a mere disc of gold, rimmed at the

edge like a coin, and about the size of a silver dollar. The surface of this golden disc was highly polished, and it reflected the slant rays of the light from the window, until it seemed rather like silver than gold with excess of brightness. A casual movement of Job's figure destroyed this effect, and, bringing the medal full in line with Mr. Bowling's vision, revealed to him certain fine but deeply graven marks upon its face. He strained his sight to make out these signs, and the curiosity he exhibited looked greatly out of proportion with its object. The little gold disc seemed fairly to fascinate the man, and his tangled head drew nearer and nearer to it until it came within Job Round's line of sight, and at that second Mr. Bowling received so sound a cuff that he fell from his chair and sat in a quite surprising manner upon the floor.

'Eh?' said Job, in a soft, wicked-sounding falsetto. Mr. Bowling said nothing, but gazed about him with an air of bewilderment as if he were asking himself how he came there. 'Get

up,' said Job, with a return to his tone of cruel banter. 'I am fated to surprise you, William. I expected you to manifest some interest in this'—holding the trinket in his thumb and finger—'and I waited for it. Would you like to know the exact latitude and longitude, and to go out and dig with pick and shovel?'

'I wasn't doing no harm, Johnny,' said Mr. Bowling. 'What's it matter now who knows the spot?—let alone a old chum like me. What is there left to go and dig for?'

'How do you know what it matters, William? How do you know what is left to go and dig for?'

Mr. Bowling had scrambled to his knees and had stayed there, not feeling quite sure what might happen if he arose to his feet, but he forgot his fears at this speech and stood up with a wild look in his eyes.

'You brought it back with you?' he cried, in a voice hoarse with excitement. 'You brought it back?'

'Does this look as if I brought it back?'

Job asked, waving his hand lightly here and there, and smiling.

'Spent it? You might ha' spent it.'

'I assure you, William, that *I* have not had the spending of it, and I quite believe that so far nobody has spent it. Why don't you go and have a try for it, William?'

'A try for it!' groaned the other. 'I've wandered barfoot about them hills. I've done all but die there.'

'And if you only knew the latitude and longitude,' said Job, with a voice of sympathy, 'you could go straight to the place—couldn't you, William?'

'I'd fetch it myself and share fair, Johnny,' said Mr. Bowling. 'I would. By the Lord I would.' Job laughed outright, but the old chum's face was a study. The very concupiscence of greed was in it. 'I'd go out with you, Johnny. I'd work. I'd fight. Nothing 'd frighten me.'

'Not even the thought of poisoning a comrade?' said Job. 'William, I regret to be

forced to the conclusion that I cannot trust you.'

'You ain't agoin' to let it lie and rot theer, are you, Johnny?' No coward ever pleaded more passionately for life. 'Oh, you can't! You can't do it. You couldn't find the heart to do it?'

'William,' said Job, with calm amusement, 'I would much rather every piastre rotted there than that you should hold one between your thumb and finger. You know me pretty well, don't you? You can go now, and you can speak to me again when you have quite made up your mind that you don't care to go on living. A word about this business to a single soul will serve your turn as well as if it was spoken to me. Now, *hidi*, *git*, William. *Chabouk*—and—*oor Allah*!'

Mr. Bowling stooped for his billycock hat, which lay upon the floor, and retired unwillingly before Job's outstretched hand. When he reached the door the outstretched hand took hold of him by the collar, and turned him

about so that he cowered from an expected kick, and was relieved to find himself simply pushed across the doorstep. He lingered there a minute or two, and peered in at the windows until he saw Job approaching with wrathful face, when he turned incontinently and fled.

At the 'Ring o' Bells' that evening Mr. Bowling was observed to drink much more freely than was his wont, and it was remarked that he was taciturn and surly. As a general thing he had been liberal of speech, and he had so many wonders to tell of that the more intelligent of the yokels, and the better read amongst the workmen who frequented the house, had pronounced him inj'yable comp'ny. Two or three attempts were made to draw him out, but he was proof against them all. Liquor had but a small effect upon him, but he drank so much on this particular evening that his tongue became thick and his eyes drowsy. Finally he arose from his seat upon the stocks, and, lifting his delft mug high in the air, threw it across the road, where it broke into many fragments,

with a crash which gave an affectionate young couple who happened to be passing in the twilight a nervous and startled sensation.

'I'll do it,' said Mr. Bowling, loudly but indistinctly; 'I'll do it. And if I can't do it myself I'll find them as can.'

'Aaron,' said one of the affectionate young people to the other, 'did the man throw at you?'

'No, my darling. He's excited with drink,' said Aaron. 'I know the fellow. He works for Clement Bache's father. I'll have a talk with him next time I see him, and teach him better than to throw crockeryware about like that.'

It was this little episode of the broken delft mug which introduced Aaron Whittaker to Mr. Bowling, with results that neither of them was able to guess at.

CHAPTER VI.

MAN in all ages has made God after his own image, worshipping his own best or his own most wonderful. When the black man passes the bit of rag or broken stick or other fetishry in the tropic forest, he gifts it with all he has, and might, if he could translate himself, produce out of his own conceptions a moderate bogey for a white infant. Unprejudiced observers passing the same fragment of fetishry go by unmoved, and the devout nigger is wonder-stricken at their blindness. Not to see deviliry and divinity and all unseen, unknowable, and terrible things in that bit of fluttering rag or those crossed branches is to be insensible to loftier thoughts, to be as one of the beasts that perish.

It is something of a pity—though the

mischief is out of the power of philosophy to cure—that a willing or unwilling submission to the fetish-worshipper's mental state should be a common preliminary to the most important of human contracts. It is all the more a pity because the intensity of worship is in proportion—as worship always is—not to the beauty and majesty of the deity, but to the spiritual excellence, the purity, the goodness, the self-devotion of the worshipper. It is all the more a pity still, that a man or a maid, whether in Belgravia or Castle Barfield, having selected his or her fetish, is bound to stick to it, even in the after-days of enlightenment, and to continue with hollow observance those forms of worship which were once an instinct of the soul.

It was the merciful provision of a code whose framers were unusually fertile in the invention of themes for legislation that ox and ass should not be yoked together, lest the stronger and more tractable animal should do all the pulling, and whilst working for two

should only get credit for one. There is no provision of that kind possible for marriage, and even if there were, the bovine imagination would be strong enough to take the longest-eared brother of the paddock and make an ox of him.

In love as in worship you do but survey yourself in a glass, with this difference, that you find not your existing self, but your most beautiful possible ideal self, there reflected. Do you think purity lovable?—then your love is pure. Do you venerate courage?—then is your love courageous. How often do you think human hearts come together? For the most part we live lonely—lonely. And we love the better part of ourselves and hate the worse, whilst we fancy we love and hate our fellows.

But it is easy, and of little profit, to fall into a melancholy mood about almost any phase of human affairs; and if the golden dream turn grey we have at least the satisfaction of knowing that it was golden whilst it lasted.

Come. The merry mower whets his scythe, and, though perhaps scarcely as merry as the poet paints him, is at least brown and strong and as free from care as most men. Near at hand the scrape of the hone upon the steel sets the teeth on edge, but when you are far enough away the steel rings out by itself as clear as a bell, and upon my word there is a touch of merriment in the sound. Let us keep a politic distance. Here is a shady nook in the far corner of the field where two great elms stretch out arms of benediction, and where, with your feet in a dry ditch, you can sit or lounge with your back against a delicious support of fresh green turf—green still, while all other grass is brown, by virtue of that shadow of blessing cast by the two great elms. But this delightful nook is occupied already. A young man is here with his arm about a girl's waist, and the girl is making no objection to that condition of affairs, and they are talking in a confidential way.

A peculiarity about this pair which is

worth notice is that the man has the lighter voice of the two. He talks in a thin tenor, whilst the girl talks in a grave and sweet contralto, by which, if you please, you are not to understand at all a dragoon-like voice, but a finely-modulated series of tones at once full and gentle, and altogether womanly. In almost any other country in the world such a voice would inevitably have made a fortune for its possessor; but in England, where beautiful voices are so common, the trained ear is rare.

'My darling,' says the young man in his light tenor tones, 'the story is as old as the hills. We can do what other people have done. If we were once quietly married, your father would come round as easily as possible.'

'I can't say, Aaron,' said the girl, 'that I won't ever deceive my father, because I'm afraid I've done that already, but I won't deceive him any longer.'

'You wouldn't let him come between us, dear?' says the young man pathetically.

'You wouldn't throw me over if he told you to?'

'No, Aaron,' said the girl with a gravity which lost none of its sweetness by reason of the blushing cheeks and downcast eyes: 'nobody'll ever come between you and me. A child must render obedience to a certain point, but not beyond. But I shouldn't dream of marrying without his knowledge, though I might marry without his consent. I hope it may never come to that, and I trust it never will. You can be sure of me, Aaron. I shall know no change.'

At this Aaron very naturally fell to kissing her fingers, with murmured protests that she was the sweetest and the dearest girl in the world. She did not repulse him, or make any pretence of coyness, but she went on gravely—

'You can come down this afternoon, and we will see father together. If he asks you what brings you there, you must tell him. I don't feel happy, Aaron, in meeting you on the

sly like this, and I shall never meet you again until father knows.'

'He'll do all he can,' cried Aaron, 'to part us and keep us apart. He doesn't like me, and he lets me see it. He'll do everything he can to prejudice you against me.'

'What is to prejudice me against *you*, Aaron?' asked the girl.

'Ah!' cries Aaron, 'you don't think so now; but if he asks you not to see me for a month or two, and keeps on dropping a word here to my disadvantage and there to my discredit, all that'll begin to tell in time.'

'You don't know father,' the girl answered with a smile. 'He is not a backbiter. If he has anything against you, Aaron, he'll tell you plainly, but he won't speak behind your back.' Young Mr. Whittaker found no comfort in that reflection. 'And what a poor opinion you have of me,' she continued with a brighter smile, 'to think me such a weathercock!'

'But, my darling,' urged Aaron, 'what is the use of having a tempest at all, if we can

get along without one?' He was not disposed to be proud of himself, and he must needs put as good a colour on his cowardice as such a material would take. 'I don't care for myself,' he added therefore; 'I haven't got to live with your father day by day and be made to see that I've offended him. I haven't got to defy an offended parent's will.' He began to think well of this line of argument. It not only defended himself and showed his solicitude for her, but it offered very good reasons to his mind why she should adopt the course he wished her to take. To kill three birds with one stone is quite a conversational achievement.

'I have been too cowardly already,' Sarah answered, 'and when I think how much he trusts me, I feel ashamed of myself. There's nobody loves me better than my father does—no, not even you, Aaron. Nobody does. Nobody ever can. Aaron, my dear, I can't bear to deceive him for another hour.'

Saying this, she rose and stepped from the

dry ditch into the field. Aaron, with no great willingness, followed her.

'My darling,' he said, 'don't act rashly. Think it over. What you are going to do may part us.' She looked him steadily in the face, and it was a little embarrassing for such a young man to have so downright a lover.

'Nothing will ever part us, Aaron, so long as you love me. But oh, my dear! how can I let father think ill of me? How can I let him think that you were afraid of him?'

That was sailing a little too near the truth to be pleasant for Aaron.

'I *am* afraid of him,' he answered diplomatically, 'but I have a right to be afraid for your sake. Your father's strong enough and big enough to take any man in Castle Barfield at a mouthful, but I don't suppose he'll want to eat me for falling in love with his daughter. But he doesn't like me, Sarah—and that's the truth—and he'll do all he can to prevent you from marrying me.'

'He will like you when he comes to know

you, Aaron,' said the girl; but Aaron, though he could accept the compliment thus conveyed, had yet his doubts as to the trustworthiness of the forecast.

'I'm not so sure of that,' he said; 'your father's prejudiced against me.'

'Very well, dear,' she answered; 'we will try to remove the prejudice. I never knew anybody who had such a dislike of anything that wasn't straightforward as my father has. The only way to please him is to be without disguise.'

'We've displeased him past remedy already,' said Aaron, 'if he only knew.'

'Not past remedy,' said the girl. 'Aaron, I am sure this is my duty. Let us go now, together. The longer we delay, the harder it will be.'

It has been said already that according to his lights the young man was in love, and even the timidest creature has a little more fight in him than common when he is moved in that way. He was not courageous by nature, but he had exhausted entreaty and persuasion, and

had found them unavailing, and now, since nothing but courage could win the lady, he must needs muster up as much as he could command, and, though a coward confessed in his own mind, must look brave to the girl's eyes. No doubt many a gentleman of old days attired himself in cold iron, and took his way to the lists, under the influence of similar emotions; and no doubt some of them, considerably to their own surprise, would acquit themselves pretty well after all.

'Very well, darling,' said Aaron. 'My fears are for you. You know your father better than I do, and if you are not afraid of him, I need not fear for you any longer.'

Of course it was sweet to be told that his fears were for her, and of course she believed him.

'And you do love me?' the tenor voice murmured, 'and you won't allow anything he can say to part us?'

'My dear,' she answered, 'he won't try to part us when he knows——'

Surely the pause would have been eloquent to any lover.

The haymakers watched them as they walked side by side across the field. It was a simple place and a simple time, and the love affairs of most young people were carried on quite openly, and with no pretence of concealment. Besides Job Round there was nobody whom this particular engagement in the least concerned who did not know all about it, and he might have known but for the isolation in which it generally pleased him to live.

They make a picture in my mind. The fierce sunlight and the drowsy shadows, the wide hayfield and its boundary hedges set with great trees, the red and grey of the parsonage standing cool and shaded amid high boskage a field or two away, the lovers in the attire of '58 — so recent, yet so quaint and out of date already—and the scattered haymakers turning to look after them.

'Ebenezer,' says one brown and withered ancient, 'thee'st see a finer couple nowheer.'

'Thee wast allays a judge of a good-lookin' wench, Jabez,' says the withered ancient's compeer. 'Her's as good as her looks, but I mislikin' the lad a bit. It's no bad sight, howsever, to look on at a young pair a sweetheartin' of a day like this.'

'Thee'd a sight sooner do that nor work. Eh, Ebenezer?'

'That I ud,' says Ebenezer, leaning on his rake to watch the lovers from the field. 'I spoke to S'liner i' that very corner fifty 'ear agoo this haymekin'. We'm ode uns now, Jabez. Stir up, lad. We shall ha' the wagin back and nothin' ready, else.'

Sarah and Aaron chose the least-frequented and the longest road, as has been the way with lovers from time immemorial; but they walked up the High Street arm in arm, a proceeding which needed a little courage, since it was equal to the calling of the banns: a mere formal declaration of a thing already known, but yet a declaration. Before things came to this stage Castle Barfield sweethearts would

meet in the fields and would part again before they reached the streets, lest the gossiping townsfolk should know their secret.

No man ever cared less to make one of a storming party than Aaron Whittaker cared to face Job Round, and when he saw the said Job leaning on the garden gate he felt a curious loosening of the joints, and had some ado to keep himself upright. But Sarah feared neither mouse nor man, and, having already braved her own instincts of maidenly reticence, had conquered everything. She had never had reason to fear her father, for he had used her to a constant tenderness in himself, and though she knew him to be a little wilful she had always had her way with him.

But open astonishment and wrath blazed out in Job Round's face when he turned and saw the pair approaching arm in arm.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Round,' said Aaron, his light tenor voice a little shaky.

'Father,' said the girl, also trembling somewhat, but for a different reason, and blushing

divinely, 'open the gate. I want to speak to you.' Job opened the gate without a word. 'Come in, Aaron,' she said, and Aaron entered, trying to look as if the father's glance was not still twisting in him like a knife. 'Wait there a moment.' Aaron waited, and Sarah, taking her father's arm in both hands, led him on one side and stood on tiptoe to whisper in his ear. He looked down at her with a pang, in which he could not tell if rage, or heartache, or pity were most strong, for her face was rosy with blushes and her bosom was fluttering, and he knew all her story before a word was spoken. 'Father,' she whispered, 'the young man has come a-courting, as you prophesied he would; and I have done as you told me, and have brought him to sit by the old dad's fireside.'

'You're not welcome to my house, Mr. Whittaker,' said Job, turning on the visitor, 'but I won't ask you to leave until I have had a talk with you. Walk inside, if you please.'

'Mr. Whittaker is *my* guest,' said Sarah, no longer trembling or blushing, but drawn to her

full height, and looking like an indignant queen.

'I beg your pardon, my dear,' said her father. 'I will try to treat the young man civilly. Will you come this way, Mr. Whittaker?'

It was a cool welcome, but it was at least as warm as he had expected, and Mr. Whittaker made shift to enter the cottage with a tolerable air of self-possession.

'Sarah,' said Job, 'you had better leave us for a little while.' Aaron cast a glance at her, and something of a look of surprise and bewilderment—almost of fear—dawned in her own face. There were few things which could be bitterer to her than to know that she had fallen in love with a coward, and Aaron did not look brave or at ease. But she would have no unworthy thought of her lover.

'I shall see you again before you go, Aaron,' she said, as she left the little parlour.

'Sit down,' said Job to his guest. 'What is your business with me?'

'I came at Miss Round's invitation,' said Aaron, 'because she was very much averse to a secret engagement.'

This was not very aptly put, but the father understood him.

'You want my leave to pay your addresses to my daughter.'

'Exactly,' said Aaron. 'Exactly, Mr. Round.'

'Very well.' Job sat with folded arms and surveyed the young man for full half a minute without further answer. 'Whatever I can do to prevent her from listening to you shall be done. I don't like you, Mr. Whittaker, and I don't think you are the man to make any good girl a husband.'

'I admit, sir,' said Aaron, 'that I have been a bit wild, but that's all over, I assure you, sir, and I should try to be a good husband.'

'You won't marry my daughter if I can help it,' said Job solidly. 'I have good reason for thinking ill of you, and I won't trust my child's immortal soul to *your* hands if I have any voice in the matter.'

'I can offer her a good position, Mr. Round,' said Aaron—'as good a position, sir, as you could wish for.'

'My daughter is in want of no man's money,' Job answered, 'and I am not talking or thinking about your position. Sarah will make her own choice, but I shall use a father's right, and advise her against you. There is no use in any more words. You can go now, and take my answer with you. One thing more. You won't speak to my girl again until I give you leave. You understand that? I don't want to threaten you, but you'll speak to her at your peril.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Round,' said the young man, taking courage at the weary quietude of the other's manner, 'but I can't pledge myself not to speak to Miss Round. She has promised to be my wife, sir; and I believe she will keep her promise. All the same, Mr. Round, I don't want to be defiant; and I do assure you, sir, that I've done with my

wild courses, and I shall do my best to make a good husband.'

'If you speak to her or write to her without my invitation or hers,' said Job, 'you will do it at your peril. I shall try to persuade her to have no more to do with you, and if I succeed I won't have you bothering her and making eyes at her.'

'I won't say that you're not treating me very courteously, Mr. Round,' began Aaron, but Job interrupted him.

'I mean neither to be courteous nor discourteous. Your feelings are not of the least interest to me, and I neither want to hurt you nor to spare you. It's a question of my daughter's welfare. If she has formed any attachment to you I shall try to persuade her against it.' Then he arose and opened the door which led into the little porch. 'Good afternoon, Mr. Whittaker.'

'I hope, sir,' said Aaron, 'that you will see fit to modify your poor opinion of me.'

'I have no hope of that sort,' Job returned. 'Good afternoon.'

Mr. Whittaker, seeing nothing else fit for it, bowed and took his leave. The interview had been less terrible than he had feared, but there was very little comfort in it. He did not dare to turn round for a last chance look from his sweetheart, for he knew that her father's eyes were upon him, and felt that their grave glance somehow impeded his gait, and made it feel mean and shuffling.

When Aaron had reached the gate, and had disappeared behind the hedge, Job closed the door, and moving to the foot of the stairs called his daughter by name, and when she descended he took her by both hands and regarded her with a look so intent, and mournful, and tender —an expression so different from any she had ever observed in his face until that moment— that it moved her strongly.

'My dear,' he said, 'you know I love you? Ah, you guess it, in a blind sort of way, as children do until they have children of their

own. My darling, I'd lay my life down to make you happy. You're all I have in the world to care for, and I've no dearer wish than to see you blessed with a good husband. You're only a child yet, and you're innocent and ignorant of the world. I'm not going to run counter to the wishes of your heart.' The tears were running down the girl's hot cheeks by this time, and at this she drew her hands from his, and casting both arms about his neck hid her face against his breast. He gave a great sigh and smoothed her radiant hair with his hands. 'You'll wait, my dear? You'll take a little time to think before you enter on the most important contract of your life? To please me.'

She kissed him vehemently, and then hid her head upon his breast again. He could feel her tears upon his face.

'I can't think well of the young man, my darling, and I can't hope that he will make you happy.'

'You will, for my sake, father,' she answered —her face still hidden.

'You must try to look at him with open eyes, my child; you must ask yourself all that a man ought to be, and all that he is.'

'He is a good man, father,' said the girl.

'To stand between you and him,' Job continued, with a heart-burning sense of impotence, 'would only make you care the more for him and the less for me. I shan't do that, because I know how useless it would be.' She made no answer, but in the pause she clasped him a little tighter round the neck, and he knew the meaning of the caress. 'He's the last young man in the world I should have chosen as a husband for you. And yet, it's you to choose, and I must accept your choice. And yet you'll think about it, dear. You'll know that your father must have grave reasons for speaking like this.'

She wept upon his breast, but that, and the answer of the caressing arms about his neck, was all the response she gave.

'Take a month, dear. Don't see him for that time, but listen to the advices of those

who love you best, and have the deepest wishes for your happiness.'

'Father!'

'My darling!'

'Don't stand between us!'

Oh, hopeless task, to combat love with reasons!

'Not between you and happiness. No, no. But between you and disappointment, dear. . . . Sarah, take a month to think about it. Talk it over with your grandmother. She's a sensible woman, and loves you dearly.'

'Father!'

'Yes, darling.'

'Don't speak ill of him. Don't think ill of him. If you weren't friends, dear, it would break my heart.'

The helpless passion of love and sorrow surged so high in the father's breast that his massive frame shook with it. When he spoke again his voice trembled.

'Take a month to think, dear. You're a good girl? You say your prayers?' He felt his own hands like a profanation as they

caressed her head, and suffered them to drop heavily at his sides.

'Take the case there, dear,' he said, his deep voice throbbing more and more. 'Ask for light about it.'

He kissed her on the forehead and moved away. When she released him from her embrace, he walked heavily upstairs into his own room, and there, for a single moment surrendering himself to the inward tempest, he cast his hands high towards the ceiling, and his whole body writhed with the torment of his mind.

Then for a long time he stood like a breathing statue with his arms folded on his breast, and at last nodding his head slowly twice or thrice, and looking with ashen-grey face and unseeing eyes before him—'Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children,' he said. 'My God! upon the children.'

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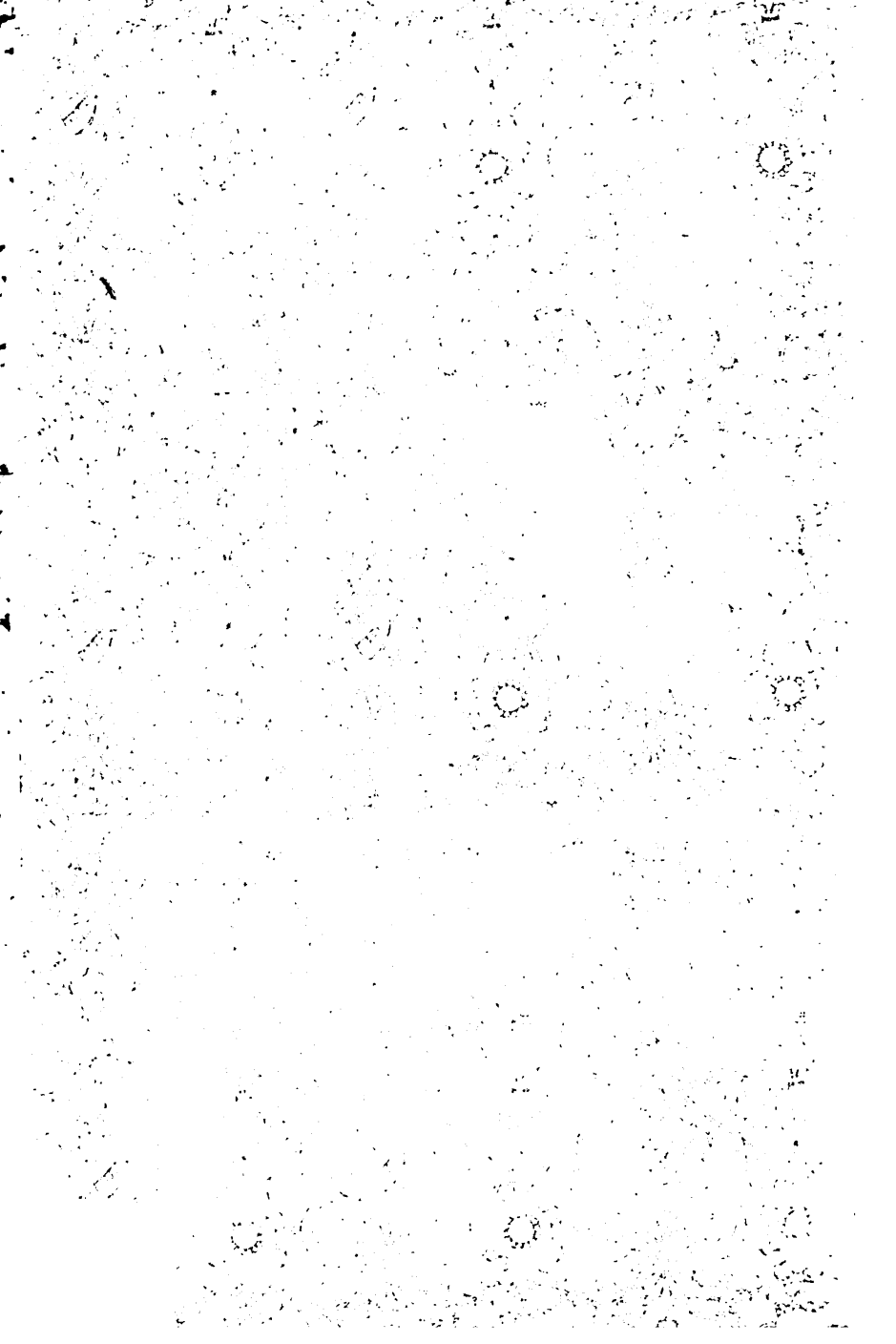
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